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A Day in the Cloister

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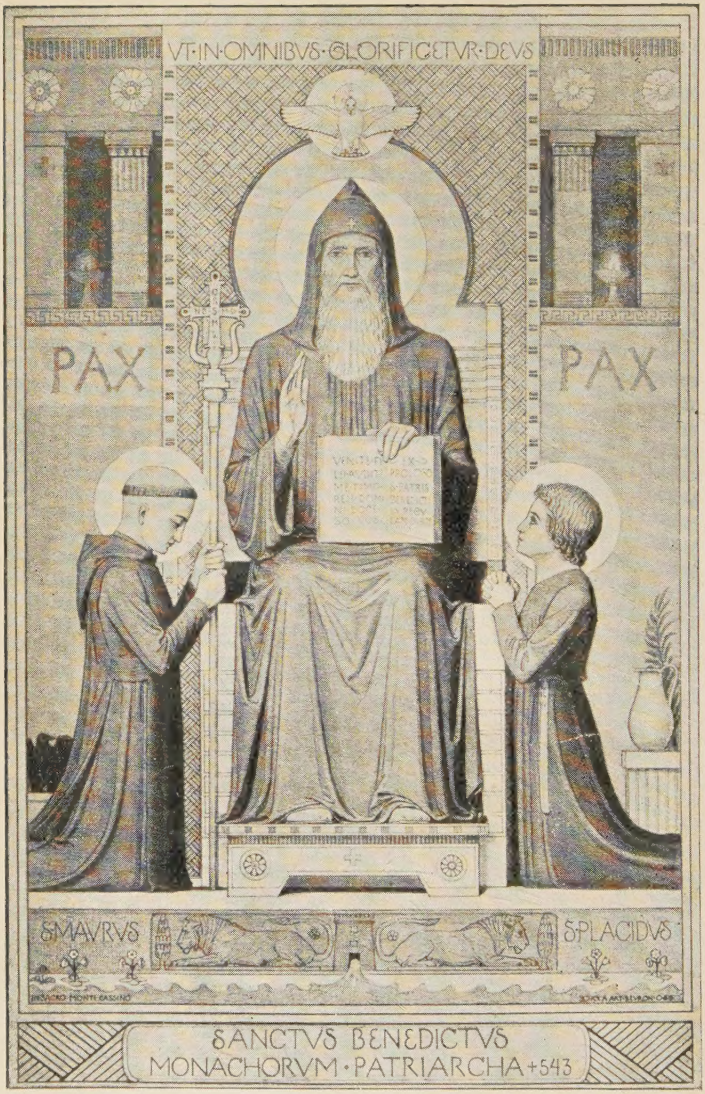
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A

Day in the Cloister

ADAPTED FROM THE GERMAN OF

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Of St. Martin's Abbey, Beuron

BY

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Of St. Thomas' Abbey, Erdington

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ARCHABBOT OF BEURON

BEST BELOVED OF FATHERS

PREFACE

A FEW words of explanation are needed to introduce this little work. A literal translation from the original was made by a nun of St Scholastica's Priory, Atherstone, who placed it in the hands of the present writer, with a view to its publication. It was thought, however, to be too long and too didactic in form to suit the taste of English readers, and so, with the kind consent of the author, extensive changes have been made in the text. It is now not a translation but an adaptation; long passages having been omitted, others altered, and a few new paragraphs inserted. But the Editor is only too conscious that he has failed to carry out his task with complete success, and it is with some trepidation that he offers the work to the indulgence of the public.

It is, however, hoped that a simple and unvarnished description of life in a modern monastery, may not be without interest, especially as so much curiosity is often evinced as to the details of monastic life. It is true that the piquancy of sensational scandals is entirely lacking from this narrative; the author has

not drawn upon his imagination, but has simply recounted what he has seen, and known, and lived. But to those who really seek to know the truth, it is hoped that his descriptions will be satisfactory.

It is only necessary to add that as our Holy Father St Benedict gave very wide discretion to the Superiors of his monasteries, it must not be expected that the life in every Benedictine Abbey should exactly correspond to that depicted here. The author has, of course, described the observance to which he is himself accustomed, and which he naturally loves and prizes. He is far from wishing to exalt them as the one necessary ideal, or to seem to reflect on holy and venerable customs observed elsewhere. The spirit of St Benedict is a very wide one, and in his Order it has ever been the custom to observe the golden rule, "*in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas.*"

D. B. C.

St Thomas' Abbey,
Erdington,
Whitsunday 1900.

U. I. O. G. D.

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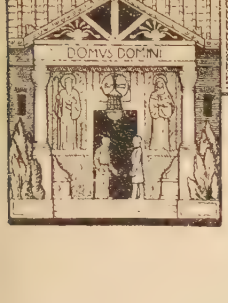

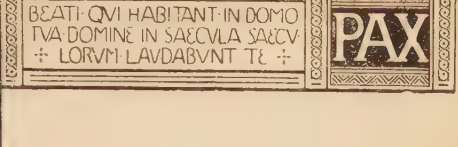

CHAPTER I

THE MONASTERY DOOR

A Benedictine Abbey. The idea raised in the minds of most of us is of some picturesque ruin where the birds alone are left to raise their chants to Heaven amid the broken arches of the roofless choir, or sadder still, perhaps, of some stately Church raised in the ages of faith for the glorious worship of the old religion, but now alienated to the service of a Communion that knows not how to fill it or to use it, but keeps it as a relic of the past centuries, empty, swept, and garnished. Surely an anachronism in these enlightened times, when monks and contemplation must give way to bustling activity!

Even among Catholics such ideas are not altogether unknown. The sad devastation of the last century has caused, even in Catholic countries, the principles and *raison d'être* of the monastic life to be understood but little. Monasteries have become almost as rare in France and Italy as in Protestant England, and though the revival has begun, it will take time yet before the monastic

institute strikes as deep roots as of old, in so parched for lack of faith.

But none the less there is a great deal of curiosity in the world about the religious life, and there are many, even outside the Catholic fold, who are deeply interested in the details of its organisation, and the minutiæ of its daily routine. There is a mysterious charm about the cloister which attracts even the worldling, and how much more devout Catholics, who are never tired of asking questions as to the interior life of a monastery. And as the monks themselves have little opportunity for gratifying this curiosity, the gap has been filled by novelists and poets, who have sought to raise the veil, by sketching imaginary pictures of the life of the cloister, pictures that are, as a rule, as far from the truth as *Gulliver's Travels* or the *Arabian Nights*. It is a pity, we think, that such caricatures should be left without correction, and so the present writer desires to do his best to gratify the innocent curiosity of outsiders, by describing the life of a Benedictine Abbey of the nineteenth century.

It is not, however, merely with [illegible] in view, that we propose to make a pilgrimage to the cloister, but also with the hope of doing some good to our souls.

For, after all, the monastic life is but a restoration of the ideal Christian life; the religious community is, before all else, a model for the Christian family, nay more, for the Christian state. The Monastery is a humble copy of the Holy House of Nazareth, and in it we see family life raised to its highest

and noblest expression. And here we must remark that the Abbey to be described in these pages is no actual existing monastery, but an imaginary one formed as far as may be on the ideal sketched of old by the great Patriarch of monks, St Benedict. Nevertheless, the life is that actually lived in many countries of Europe at the present day by Benedictine monks, and though the various parts of the monastery may not exist as described in any one house, they are none the less drawn from life, and are to be found in one or the other monastery belonging to our Order. May our Holy Father deign to bless the humble work of his disciple!

Let us imagine that we are traversing a mountain valley; the verdant slopes are thickly wooded, and a bright noisy stream rushes down towards us from the steep hillside; we turn a corner, and a broad meadow opens out before us. Above, on the summit of a gentle eminence, appear the stately buildings of our Abbey. Like the "City of God," it is enthroned upon the mountains, solemn and grave in aspect, and yet how attractive. "*Benedictus montes amabat*," says the proverb, and the Benedictines have ever loved to raise their homes upon the hill-top.

The golden light of the setting sun makes the many windows glitter like diamonds, and the graceful towers of the Church stand out in sharp outline against the tender lilac of the sky. In the background of the picture rise sombre mountains, wooded at their base, but rising stern and rugged to the

region of perpetual snow. So fair is the scene, that we pause for a while, rapt in silent admiration. But the silence is broken all at once by the clear rich tones of the Abbey bells. They are calling the monks to the solemn worship of God. But not alone to the monks do they speak, they have a message for the country folk around, they invite them to join in spirit with the psalmody which is about to arise to God from the monastic choir. The labourer looks up for a moment from his toil, his wife crosses herself devoutly, and thus they too take their share in the divine work, and receive their share of the merit.

The Monastery in a Catholic country is indeed the centre whence the religious life of a vast circle radiates, and from it the faithful of the neighbourhood are wont to seek spiritual consolation and assistance. They learn to penetrate the spirit of the ecclesiastical festivals, the times and seasons of the Church's year, and thus they become unconsciously drawn into the mysterious cycle of the liturgical worship of God, into that mighty stream of prayer flowing forth from the monastic choir.

But we are already in the precincts, under the shadow of the crozier, as they say in France. And this is evident by the groups of pilgrims flocking from different quarters to the same goal: we see it, too, in that great Crucifix, standing in the midst of yonder field, in that flower-decked picture of Our Lady of Pity by the wayside, as well as in the fields and meadows which, by their admirable state of culti-

vation, bear witness to the skill and industry of the lay-brothers of the monastery.

Up yonder in the freshly mown meadow you can just distinguish their black figures; they have been piling up the last trusses of hay on the already laden waggons, which the sturdy grey horses are just about to drag homewards for the last time to-day.

The Brothers seemed to have finished their work; you can see them wiping the sweat from their brows as they form into a little group. And now, leaning on their rakes and forks, they are reciting the prayer they are wont to say at the end of the day's toil: "*Benedictus es Domine Deus qui adjuvisti me et consolatus es me*," "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, for Thou hast helped me and hast been my strength." And as the sound of the little thanksgiving floats over the fields, it mingles with the sonorous tones of the Abbey bells, and it is with strains like these in our ears that we reach at last the hospitable entrance of the monastery.

Having passed beneath the noble gateway tower, with its sculptured saints looking down benignly upon us, and its rich armorial carvings setting forth the heraldic bearings of the Abbey and its principal benefactors, we reach the inner door. Here we see a figure of the holy Patriarch St Benedict smiling as if to welcome us to his house, while underneath his image runs the legend: "BEATI QUI HABITANT IN DOMO TUA DOMINE." Yes, verily, happy are they that dwell in the House of the Lord!

It is a paradise on earth, peace and joy reign therein, for its inhabitants have won that peace of God which passeth all understanding. *Pax:* the monastic device is no empty formula. Peace reigns in the house of God, peace in the hearts of the brethren, all find that peace who enter there to seek it, even the letters which leave the Monastery bear at their head this greeting of peace, *pax.* Blessed oasis in the desert of life, peaceful refuge for human misery, quiet haven from the tempests of the world!

Many indeed are they who knock at the monastery door! The poor come to beg for alms and food; those poorer still come to seek for consolation in their sorrows; pious souls in need of counsel, guests who seek a few days' refreshment in the quiet of the cloister, priests and religious, men of high and low degree, rich and poor, young and old, all knock at this door, and, please God, never in vain. But first and foremost there come young men full of eager longing and timid hopes, older men too sometimes, fired with the same longing to work out their salvation within these holy walls, and find therein their happiness for time and for eternity.

And now the mysterious door opens. The brother porter, venerable with his long white beard, looks at us with kindly inquiry. He says in his heart, if not in words, the greeting prescribed by his holy rule, "*Deo gratias*," as often as he opens the door to a stranger. He has been taught to reverence in the person of the unknown traveller, Jesus Christ our

Lord Himself. And, therefore, "Thanks be to God" is the greeting St Benedict would put upon his lips. He must, indeed, be prudent, and possess the gift of discernment of spirits, *senex sapiens:* "a wise old man," as St Benedict says, for the waves of the world beat against that monastery door, and seek to gain an entrance there, and it is his part to defend the peace of the cloister, by sending away those who come but to intrude, and joyfully receiving those who are called thither by God.

The brother porter has quickly learned our business. He leads the ladies who have asked for one of the Fathers—their relation perhaps, or their spiritual director — into one of the parlours which open into either side of the entrance hall.

He then goes to ask permission of the Superior to summon the Father who is wanted. Clerical visitors are shown into another room, whence they are soon introduced into the cloister by the Father Hosteller or Guest-master. Yonder are some pilgrims who are asking for pictures and medals, pious country people who desire to bespeak a holy mass for some anniversary, a child who has come to beg that one of the Fathers would visit its sick mother, and another who is asking for medicine.

The poor, those true representatives of Jesus Christ, already know their own place, and are sitting quietly on the benches placed for them around the walls of the entrance hall, patiently awaiting, beads in hand, the distribution of the evening soup.

In those monasteries which are situated in or near towns, there is often at the dinner hour so great a number of hungry guests assembled at the Abbey gates, that the soup has to be carried out in large cauldrons. Then, perhaps, one of the Fathers will sit down and read to them from some pious book, so that their souls, too, may be refreshed and fed. Our monasteries have ever responded to the call of charity, and this is not the least important of their duties. The beneficence practised in the monasteries of the Middle Ages towards the poor and the needy was something truly amazing.

Thus at Hirschau, two hundred poor people were daily fed at the Abbey gate, at Cluny there were seventeen thousand succoured in a year. At Glastonbury and Ely, and at a hundred other houses scattered through the length and breadth of England, the poor of Christ found food for soul and body, and never were they turned away empty. In this active charity the monks do indeed but follow the example of their holy Father, who, even in a time of famine shared his last crust of bread, and his last drop of oil with his poorer brethren.

We remember, too, how our great Pope Gregory, when a Benedictine Monk upon the Coelian Hill, fed every day twelve poor men and washed their feet with his own hands, and how, on one memorable occasion, a thirteenth was found among them, and "his form was like unto the Son of God." Now-a-days, it is true, numerous modern congregations divide between them the various branches of Christian

charity; yet no monastery is exempted from the duty, or rather the privilege of charity towards the poor and needy, and never are the hungry turned away unfed from Benedictine doors.

CHAPTER II

THE CLOISTERS

We may now leave our fellow pilgrims, and pass within the inner door which faces us as we enter the vestibule. Over it we see inscribed the significant word CLAUSURA (enclosure). This enclosure is the barrier which separates the House of God from the outside world, the bolt which shuts in the *claustrum* or cloister, the rampart of defence which protects the community from the spirit of the world. Holy Church has raised this sheltering wall around it, the decrees of many popes and councils have strengthened it, the monk honours and loves it as his dearest privilege. He leaves it only, despite of himself, when sent forth by holy obedience, he yearns after it as long as he is detained without, and on his return he greets with joy the threshold of his true home.

Every time he goes out, he first receives the blessing of his Superior, and on his return he receives it once more, as if it were a purifying bath to cleanse him from the dust of the high-road; and if he has to be absent for any length of time (for more than

a week, to be precise, he kneels, before starting, in the midst of the choir and begs for the prayers of his brethren and the blessing of the Abbot, to support and protect him "in all the chances of the way." On his return home he kneels again in the choir, and the brethren join in prayer for him that God may pardon him, if he has been wanting in due custody of the eyes or ears or tongue.

From all this we see clearly that the enclosure door is something more than a barrier to keep out thieves.

We are now in the *claustrum*, the cloisters of the Monastery. They form a quadrangle enclosing the cloister-garth, an open space covered with velvety turf, in the midst of which stands a stone cross, the *Lignum Vitæ*, the Tree of Life, in the midst of the Paradise of God. The base of the cross forms a fountain, and from its four sides gush forth perpetually four streams of living water, typical of that water of life of which "if a man drink he shall never thirst again."

A religious silence reigns around us. Dark figures flit to and fro, but they pass so noiselessly that we hardly notice them, and there is no hum of conversation to be heard; we might almost be in the church itself.

Silence has ever formed a most important part of the discipline of the cloister, and our monastic forefathers well knew the reason why they set such store by it. Even pagan philosophers used to judge of their disciples by their power of keeping silence. The Christian ascetic knows that it is the holy soil from which the tree of perfection springs. "He who ruleth his tongue, the same is a perfect man." The

Fathers of the desert were masters of silence. St Pachomius once gave this single counsel to a disciple who came to ask him to instruct him in the way of perfection: "Be silent," and when years afterwards he met him again, and asked him whether he should give him yet another precept, the monk replied, "As yet I have enough to do to live up to the first."

Our Holy Father St Benedict says, "Monks should keep silence at all times," and he devotes an entire chapter of his Rule to silence, *taciturnitas;* for he knows what a wonderful aid it is both to recollection and union with God, and to the due performance of the Divine Office. Now these are the monks' two principal obligations. A monastery in which silence is not well-observed bears the marks of decay and is ailing in all its members. "As an oven with open doors cannot long retain the heat," says St Bernard, "neither can the heart preserve within itself the grace of devotion, if the lips be not closed by the grace of silence."

And is not this true even outside in the world? Are not talkative, loquacious men looked upon as fools, while those who know how to keep silence are considered wise? Do we not often repent of having spoken, but very seldom of having held our tongues? "In the multitude of words thou shalt not want sin," says Holy Writ,* "No, nor folly and rashness either," adds worldly wisdom.

Perhaps it would do good to not a few of our social butterflies were they to breathe for a few days the pure atmosphere of monastic silence. To many

* Proverbs x, 19.

invalids is recommended the keen dry air of the snowy Engadine, or that of the pine forests rich in ozone, or again the bracing breezes of the seashore; and in like manner the sick soul would do well to come from time to time to seek a cure in the invigorating air of the cloister. In silence the soul grows strong, in silence God speaks to it, in silence His words are listened to.

Opposite the door by which we entered the cloister we find a small chapel with a picture of our Blessed Lady. Here we may kneel a moment and pay our homage to the Mistress of the house. It is the custom in the Monastery to say a "Hail, Mary" here before going out and on the return home. The picture is a copy of an ancient fresco that was found in the paternal home of St Benedict at Rome (now the Church of San Benedetto in Piscinula, in Trastevere), and it is before this picture that, according to a pious tradition, the nobly-bred boy was wont to pour out fervent supplications for the blessing of Heaven on his high vocation.

It is therefore a continual reminder to the sons of St Benedict to think with thanksgiving and awe of that hour of grace in which he was first led to his monastic home. Before the little shrine a lamp is kept continually burning, and it is always decked with fresh flowers.

*Virginis intactæ cum veneris ante figuram, prætereundo cave ne sileatur ave**, runs an old monastic

* "When thou comest before the image of the immaculate Virgin, take care to say an *Ave* as thou passest by." (From a fresco of Fra Angelico in the Cloister of San Marco, Florence).

legend, and few are those who pass before this shrine of the Mother of God without pausing for a moment to offer her a reverent homage.

The cloister in which we are standing is alike in all essential features to those grand examples of mediæval architecture with which we are all familiar, such, for instance, as the cloisters of Westminster, Gloucester, Durham, or Worcester. The long-drawn alleys are vaulted in stone. On one side we gaze through the traceried windows on to the pleasant green sward of the cloister garth, on the other the wall is decorated with frescoes interspersed with "legends" (texts from the Holy Scriptures or the Rule of St Benedict), or pierced here and there by the doorways or staircases leading to the different parts of the house. The cloister is, as it were, the forum or market-place of the City of God, but without the noise of the market. All the different corridors converge towards it, from it we enter the church, the refectory, the chapter-house. Here it is that distinguished guests are publicly received, here the Convent assembles before the Divine Office, here in wet weather the hour of recreation is often passed.

It is a public place, and therefore intercourse is more free, though still, of course, subject to the regulations of monastic observance. We notice that brethren who have some business to discuss, retire to the embrasure of a window, and say what is necessary to be said in a low voice, so as not to disturb the others. It does not take long to settle, and with a parting, *benedicite*, they take leave of one another, and each goes his way with grave demeanour and

measured gait, his hands hidden beneath his long black scapular, the hood upon his head.

Our Holy Father considers this exterior carriage as a matter of no slight importance. He gives it as the twelfth degree of humility in his famous chapter on that virtue.

This control of the spirit over the body should be perpetual, he says; whether a monk walk or stand, at the Divine Office, at prayer, in the cloister, in the garden, on a journey, or in any employment; everywhere he should consider himself as a sinner in the presence of his judge, and, like the publican, unworthy to raise up his eyes to Heaven.

But let us return to the cloister. The walls, as we observed, are painted in fresco. They portray events in the life of the Founder of our Holy Order, and in those of his earliest disciples. In a venerable Franciscan Convent I remember seeing the same thing; the life and miracles of St Francis adorned the cloister walls. The cloisters of the great Dominican Convent of the Minerva at Rome are covered with paintings representing the Saints and Beati of that glorious Order, while many of us will remember the exquisite frescoes of Fra Angelico in the cloisters of San Marco, at Florence.

In the same way, noble families take a pride in hanging on their walls the portraits of their distinguished ancestors, and teach their children to regard them with veneration and try to walk in their footsteps.

Religious also are proud of their ancestry. They, too, look up with just pride to their forefathers

whose portraits smile down upon them from the cloister walls, they also are thereby reminded of their twofold duty to venerate these great ancestors and strive to imitate their noble deeds. They know that it is of little use to bear the same name and the same habit, unless their hearts are inspired by the same lofty aims, and their lives sanctified by a like heroic devotion.

These frescoes, which are simple in colouring but powerful in outline, show us how St Benedict, a youth of scarcely fourteen summers, after leaving his father's house and flying from the luxurious city, led a life of prayer and contemplation in the rocky cave of Subiaco. Here, in three hard years of solitary combat, he fought and won that great battle which the rest of us have to continue, with varying success, during our whole lives. Here he overcame the three hereditary foes of mankind, the devil, the world, and the flesh, in such sort as to become the great and mighty general, under whose standard thousands have been led to victory. Then was he called forth by God from this lonely cavern to become, like Abraham, the Father of a countless multitude of sons. He thus taught us the great lesson of solitude, which all the founders of religious Orders have confirmed by their example; that to win God we must forsake the world and seek Him in the silence and solitude of our hearts, where He ever speaks to those who are willing to listen to His voice.

When God had thus formed the holy youth into an instrument of His power and wisdom, He led him forth from his hiding-place, and set his light

as on a candlestick. And so we next see him represented preaching the Gospel to the poor shepherds of the Campagna, and soon surrounded by disciples, for the proud Roman patricians brought him their sons to educate; and then we see him founding Monasteries, giving them a Rule, and leading troops of holy cenobites in the service of God. The whole life of St Benedict, as described to us by St Gregory the Great, is a long chain of miracles, and he does not divide his account by the years of the events of the Saint's life, but by the miracles which marked his every step.

These frescoes show us, for instance, how St Benedict made the sign of the Cross over a cup of poisoned wine presented by a treacherous hand, and how the cup was at once shattered, as if by a stone; how he was victorious over the fiends of Hell in a series of miracles, when they sought to hinder the building of the Monastery of Monte Cassino: how by his prayer, he raised the dead, cast out devils, extinguished fires: how he fed his hungry monks miraculously, and made oil to overflow in the vessels; how his glance penetrated into the hearts of his disciples, so as to read their thoughts, following them on their journeyings, bringing the guilty to confession, and the repentant to pardon. We see him holding that nocturnal converse with his holy sister Scholastica, whose prayer had moved the Heavens, and obtained the grace of that last discourse; and, finally, we behold the death of the saintly patriarch, how, standing before the Altar of God, surrounded by his disciples

and supported by them, with eyes and hands uplifted in prayer, he gave back his great soul to God, his Creator. Yonder, the pictures give us representations of monastic life, showing how the sons of this holy Father fulfilled their high vocation, in field and vineyard, in art and science, by preaching and instructing; thus becoming the means of bringing to, or increasing in all the nations of Europe the blessings of Christianity, and, therewith, the benefits of culture and morality. There we see the great ones of our Order, St Maurus, St Augustine, St Boniface, spreading alike the Gospel and the holy Rule; holy Popes, like St Gregory the Great, Gregory VII., Urban II.; true reformers in the Church; holy Martyrs, Bishops and Doctors, such as St Anselm and St Bede, holy Confessors, and holy Virgins, as St Gertrude, St Mechtilde, St Hildegard, and St Walburga. Truly, not only the heart of a Benedictine, but that of every Catholic, may well beat high at the sight of such a glorious company! What gallery of ancestors can show the like? In what royal castle shall we find such a numerous and brilliant array of illustrious princes? No wonder if that young monk, who is looking at their pictures yonder, feels himself humbled at the sight of them, knowing how unworthy he is to wear the same habit as they, and yet, at the same time, powerfully encouraged by the possession of such models, such brethren, such intercessors. The way they trod is his way too, the book of laws which sanctified them is the self-same holy Rule by which he also is to be guided.

And in order that he may lay this ever to heart, the eloquent walls of the cloisters place the very words of that Rule before his eyes. They remind him of the "instruments of good works" forged long ago by God the Holy Spirit. First of all, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and then thy neighbour as thyself." On this fundamental precept rest all the others, yes, and all Christian perfection. For the religious, who has made the striving after perfection his life-long task, there follow the laws of self-renunciation: to chastise the body, not to seek after delights, to love fasting, not to give way to sleep; to guard the tongue; to avoid much speaking; not to fulfil the desires of the flesh." Moreover, the command to love our neighbour applies to him in a special way; "To relieve the poor; to clothe the naked; to visit the sick; to bury the dead; to comfort the afflicted;" he must "not return evil for evil; he must rather bear an injury than do one; he must bless those who speak ill of him, and love his enemies. When he has thus regulated his intercourse with his neighbour, he will enter into himself and acknowledge that he must attribute to God any good he may find there, and ascribe to himself, as his own true property, all that is evil. Knowing himself thus, he cannot but "dread the day of Judgment, fear Hell, have death daily before his eyes, and desire life everlasting with spiritual thirst." He knows that "God beholds him in every place," and therefore does he daily, with sighs and tears, confess

his sins to God; he takes upon himself with joy the yoke of obedience, since he "hates his own will," and shuns self-exaltation; hence he "never despairs of the mercy of God," and prefers nothing on earth to the love of Christ. These are the fundamental principles on which our holy legislator has based his work. We see plainly that they are no other than those given by our Divine Master to all His scholars. The perfection of the religious state does not consist in new virtues and other laws, but its members pledge themselves to keep the commandments of God and of the Church in a more special way, and to make the striving after a more perfect walk with God the one object of their life. They have fewer hindrances and more graces, but also greater responsibilities never to lose sight of this lofty aim. Therefore do they separate themselves from the world, in dress and by enclosure; therefore do they dwell together under the guidance of a Superior; therefore do they keep their eyes ever fixed on those great Saints who have gone before them, and with whom they feel themselves closely united through their common Father.

CHAPTER III

BEFORE THE STATUE OF THE FOUNDER

WE have turned a corner, and have reached the central point of the monastery buildings. Here the cloisters open out into a large vestibule, surrounded by columns, facing the entrance to the refectory. It has already grown dark, but in a niche we see a glimmering light. We approach it. Between two massive columns stands a statue of more than life-size; it is that of a venerable old man, with flowing beard, and ample garments, his staff and book of laws in his hand; lamps burn at his feet, and in the shadow of the great pillars, some of the brethren kneel in prayer. It is a quiet, sacred spot, a little sanctuary in the house.

In the wide squares of our chief cities, monuments have been erected to men of greater or less renown. There they stand, surrounded by the life and bustle of the noisy crowd, the bronze figures of celebrated princes and generals, of honoured statesmen, and inventors, of great poets, and artists; men of action and of intellect, whose worth their country

FLVMINA · FLAVERVNT · VENTI · ET · IMPEGERVNT · IN · DOMVM · ILLAM · ET · NON · CECIDIT · AEDIFICAVIT · DOMVM · SVAM · SVPRA · PETRAM · VENERVNT

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SANCTVS · BENEDICTVS

delights to honour by handing down their image to posterity.

Is it, then, to be wondered at if on this, the market-place of the city of God, its prince and founder, its father and master, should hold the most honourable place? And well may he compare with all the other "great men"! What they were, and what they did for their country, that, and more than that, he was and did for the kingdom of God. They lived but for one nation, for one age, and for one tongue. Their influence was cramped and fleeting. Here we meet a man, to portray whose influence, in its whole extent, would be to write the history of the western nations, from the seventh century down to the later period of the Middle Ages. For we may truly say that St Benedict is the spiritual father of Europe, the founder of our Christian civilisation.

How is that possible? We are well aware—who, in fact, is ignorant?—how quietly and silently his life passed away. He was a youth of tender years, when he left his home and his parents, and by so doing, renounced all influence, power, and wealth. He fled away into solitude, and hidden in the rocky cave of Subiaco, led for three years a life of prayer and contemplation. There poor shepherds found him, and he became their teacher. There scholars assembled round him, and he founded monasteries, he gave them rules, and lived with his monks far from the world, dividing his time between work and prayer, until his happy death. What is there here of distinction, power, and greatness? How can this man be styled the regenerator of Europe? We forget that

God's thoughts are other than those of men, that He has no need of earthly greatness, and of human means. Did not our Divine Redeemer Himself lead a poor and retired life? Did He not, after a hidden life of three and thirty years and a public ministry of only three, leave to twelve poor fishermen and a little group of faithful followers the task of conquering the world, and renewing the face of the earth? Who throughout the vast Roman empire spoke of the despised Jewish Rabbi, who at the command of a local administrator had been put to death on the Cross? And yet, beneath the blows of that hammer the world-wide sovereignty of Pagan Rome quivered at every point; and as His divinely prophetic lips had declared: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

St Benedict was the instrument of God. Formed by Him in solitude he came forth a perfect man, *vir Dei*, a man of God. As the moon shining with its chaste brightness mirrors back the sun, so did he reflect the radiance of the Son of God; full of gentle majesty and cheerful dignity, he was the type and model of a Religious. Thus he was capable of attracting scholars, of filling them with his spirit, which combined a wondrous mixture of gravity and sweetness, and of forming them into that leaven which was to work throughout all the nations of the west.

The waves of the wandering nations had flooded and torn asunder the already rotten Roman empire; morality, law, and religion, were well-nigh submerged beneath its floating remains. It was a time of wild

confusion, and of the absence of all social restraint. Even the Church was beset by heresiarchs, persecuted by Arians; and the Teutonic races, and the whole of northern and eastern Europe were still Pagan. Meanwhile, in the rocky cave of Subiaco, amid the thorns of mortification, that man was being sanctified whom God had chosen for Himself. He caused him to found on Monte Cassino the City of Faith, unto which flocked alike the flower of the nobility, the men of the people, priests, warriors, and peasants, from all lands, and whence streamed forth legions of monks and saints, to subject the world by their invincible self-sacrifice to the Cross and to Holy Church. They went forth to spread the knowledge of the Christian faith, of morality and justice; they taught agriculture and handicrafts, they fostered science and art; around their monasteries were grouped the cottages of peasantry, and there by degrees towns sprang up, which owed to them their life and light. They became the counsellors of princes, the founders of a well-ordered state, the defenders of justice and of order.

But St Benedict was not only the organiser of this wonderful army of God, he was also, and he continued to be, its leader and teacher, for his spirit lived on in his sons and in his Holy Rule. By means of this "Code of Christian perfection and moderation" are wrought all these miracles; and this Rule it is which forms the most sublime monument of his greatness, the key of the whole riddle, how one single man could be the cause of such untold blessings. The evangelical counsels have always had followers in the Church. There

were Religious, there were monasteries; but the first springtide of Monasticism, with its giant forms, SS. Paul, Antony, and Pachomius, was already past, and it was needful for the institution to take some settled shape, wherein might be embodied for all time that spirit which had animated those heroes of old. It was necessary to establish milder laws, whereby posterity might be enabled to attain to a like height of sanctity. The Rule of St Benedict was the first to be written for the West; it surpassed all previous attempts at regulating the monastic life within the Church; and avoiding their defects and their excessive severity, it gave the Religious life its perfect form. And thus might St Peter Damian well say of it, "the Holy Spirit guided its words," and St Bridget hear from the lips of the Mother of God, that the fire which flamed forth in the Rule of St Benedict, and which had sanctified so many souls, had been enkindled by the Holy Ghost.

Even without going through the contents of the Holy Rule, we may easily become acquainted with its spirit, for it will accompany us all through the house; it has formed it, it has constructed each cell, and it has animated the whole; it resounds in the Divine Office, and takes its share in every occupation; it is the motive power of each lever and wheel, the well-tempered pendulum which sways and controls the whole interior organisation. Innumerable expositions and commentaries have been written and published upon the Rule of St Benedict, for, like all books filled with the Spirit of God, it is inexhaustible, a treasury from which the wise father

of the family can continually draw out things new and old. For us it may suffice to say that the Holy Rule regulates the common life in the monastery in two points.

First, it aims at the personal sanctification of the individual, for the cloister is a school of sanctity and of the devout life. It was in order to become holy that the monk left the world and joined the army of Jesus Christ. He had heard these words: "Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect;" and again, "If thou wilt be perfect, leave all and come and follow Me," and he has followed the voice that thus called him. Henceforth, the Holy Rule imposes upon him the striving after perfection as a promise made to God, and it regulates all else to this end. Even a Christian in the world should tend to perfection, but in the cloister he will find on the one hand more grace, more help, fewer perils, but on the other hand, greater responsibility. This high aim, which can never be fully attained on earth, is striven after by prayer, work, and obedience. Prayer and work are as the grindstones which, set in motion by obedience, must cut and polish the precious stone, until it is freed from its roughness and defects, and sparkles with the brilliancy of virtue. By its wonderful indication of this course, the Holy Rule of St Benedict has become the great exemplar of all monastic life, and the rich source whence all later founders of Religious Orders have drawn.

Secondly, it orders and organises the monastic community. According to his Rule, St Benedict

makes the spiritual Superior, to whom all are subject by voluntary obedience, a Father. It confers upon him the fullest authority, as the representative of Christ, but at the same time it tempers this power by the sweet bonds of paternal love and filial reverence, and binds together into one family, the father, the sons, and the brethren. It regulates all right and duties, placing a council of the seniors at the side of the Abbot, and imposes on him and on all of them the law of prudence, moderation, and mildness. It is the greatest achievement of St Benedict, thus to have ordered monastic life, and by so doing to have made it a type and pattern of the Christian family. Nay, in its sage ordering it has even become a model for a Christian state. The radiance of the Holy Rule enlightened and intensified the national and family life of the Middle Ages, and united it in the closest way with Holy Church. Well, therefore, might Pope Stephen III. exclaim to the holy Patriarch: "*Ave legislator universalis!*" "Hail, thou lawgiver of nations!"

Whilst the Holy Rule thus aims at two chief ends, the sanctification of the individual and the due ordering of the monastic family, it attains at the same time its third object, *i.e.*, the influence, so rich in blessings, of the cloister on the outer world. "A city set on a hill can not be hid," a great fire must shed light and heat on all around. By its example and its action an abbey must exercise a wide-spreading influence on all without. It is a centre of prayer, towards which flock from all parts those who seek spiritual aid; but it is a citadel also, from

the ramparts of which go forth the warriors of Christ, to do battle with the enemy in the open field.

What shall we say of the author of the Holy Rule? The saints are the work of God; and as each work of God has its appointed place and end in the scheme of salvation, so has every saint formed by the Spirit of God his destined task and mission in Holy Church. This truth is clearly evident with regard to St Benedict. The period at which he lived, his work, and its results were providential with regard to the Middle Ages, nor were they confined to them; still the old stem of his Holy Order puts forth branches, and we have a prophecy that in the last times it has an important task to fulfil in the Church. The gifts which God bestows upon His saints are in accordance with their destiny, and are such as to render them fitting instruments in His hand. Therefore was St Benedict, as his biographer St Gregory the Great says of him, "filled with the spirit of all the just."

This is a great saying, and we may well ponder it for a few moments. It implies that he possessed all virtues in a super-eminent degree. Many saints are conspicuous models of one or other virtue; in St Benedict we have, according to St Gregory, a pattern of perfection; the harmonious and complete image of a perfect Christian. This indeed he must have been, in order to become the leader and teacher of a great people.

It is said of him that he possessed the spirit of the patriarchs of old, that in chastity he resembled Joseph

in Egypt; that like Elias he was sanctified in solitude, and had miraculous power with God; that at his death he was like Jacob, surrounded by his sons, and that himself, blessed of God, he gave back his spirit into the hand of his Creator, whilst blessing all around.

"Filled with the spirit of all the just." This he showed himself to be in his Holy Rule, which was to become the great handbook of Christian perfection. Like another Moses, veiled in the cloud of solitude, he received, together with the mission, both the power and the wisdom requisite for the establishment of his Order. From the hand of God he received the book of the law, by which, for centuries to come, monastic life in the West was to be guided. As St Gregory said, he could write no otherwise than he lived, nor could he live but as he wrote, and thus were both he and his Rule filled with the spirit of all the just.

Finally, one may say that he was "filled with the spirit of all the just," because, like Abraham, he was the father of many nations, which he made holy to the Lord; because from his loins went forth a host of saintly men and women, who have been resplendent in the Church of God by the lustre of their virtue. Innumerable Saints, Martyrs, Popes, Bishops, Doctors of the Church, Confessors, Holy Women and Virgins, have followed, like the brilliant tail of some bright comet, in the wake of their father and leader. St Gertrude saw in a vision St Benedict standing in the presence of the Most Holy Trinity. From all his limbs sprouted roses of glowing hue and rich

perfume, and from every blossom sprung in marvellous productiveness fresh roses, and others from these again, so that the holy Father appeared like some wondrous rose-tree, one mass of bloom. And she understood that these roses represented his children and all their virtues which he was able to offer to God, and which by their sweet blossoms and perfume perpetuated his fame to all eternity. Was he not then truly filled with the spirit of all the just?

Oh, how wonderfully inspiring is the remembrance and contemplation of such a Father to the hearts of his sons!

Perhaps one or other of our guests has a son or a brother whom he has given up to St Benedict, and through whom he feels himself in a manner related to the holy Patriarch. In a certain manner we are all indebted to him, for not only do the black monks, who bear his name, and others who follow his Rule, belong to him, but he is a patron of the Christian family, a friend and father in the Christian home, a teacher of true Christian family life. In past ages he rescued Europe from the confusion of unbelief and licentiousness, and placed social life on more secure foundations; and still to-day he looks down with pitying eyes upon our debased condition. And I may well beg our visitor of whatever station or calling he may be, to kneel down for a moment with us, and commend himself to the protection and intercession of this powerful and holy man of God.

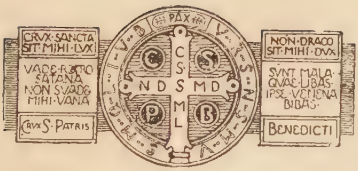
To-day is Tuesday, the day consecrated to St Benedict, week by week. That is why lamps are

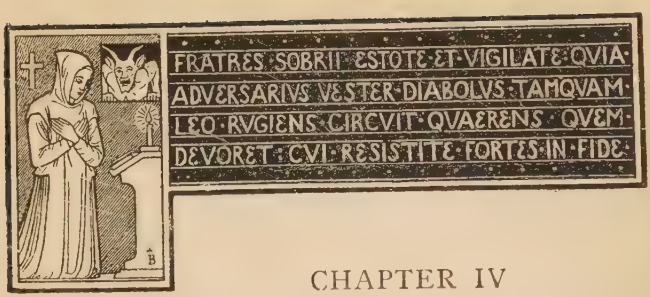
burning before his statue, and in their pleasant shimmering light, the brethren are to be seen kneeling around it.

The work of the day is over, once more a day less of life remains; we are a day nearer to death, a day nearer to Heaven. So the sons come to greet their Father, to thank him for the grace of their vocation, to renew their vows and to implore that greatest of graces, fidelity, to their vocation, and a happy death. This latter we, too, may ask, for St Benedict has promised to assist in their last struggle all those who daily remind him of his own blessed death. Commend to him also your family, your children; he has always received the little ones with a tender father's heart; and then enlarge your heart and extend your prayer to the whole of our beloved land, once St Benedict's patrimony, and now forgetful of his name.

"O holy Father St Benedict, support Holy Church by thy powerful intercession, uphold the Apostolic See, which has been occupied by so many of thy sons. Father of so many bishops, implore for us pastors like to those whom thy Holy Rule has formed. Father of so many Apostles, beg for us new messengers of the Gospel, who by their word and by their blood may triumph over unbelief, as did so many whom thou hast drawn into thy cloisters. Father of so many doctors, pray that the Spirit of God may shed fresh light over science, to the salvation of the Church and the subversion of error. Father of so many ascetics, look upon our misery and enkindle in us a zeal for Christian perfection.

Patriarch of the monks of the West, fill those Orders with new life and fresh ardour, which the Holy Spirit, in the richness of its grace, has brought forth in the Church. All look up to thee as their venerated predecessor, let them experience the wholly supernatural power of thy paternal affection. Amen." (Dom Guéranger.)

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CHAPTER IV

NIGHT

THE night has come, and all the halls and passages of the Abbey are wrapt in darkness. The lamp hanging from the vaulted roof of the cloisters shows us the way without dispersing the deep shadows. There is something mysterious about this darkness, but to the inhabitants of the cloister it is very familiar and agreeable. They say that night is no man's friend, but in the cloister this is not true, for night loses all its horror in the light of faith. The Incarnate God has put an end to night's reign of terror, together with death and sin. He has changed and sanctified it, since "While all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of its course, Thy Almighty Word, O Lord, leapt down from Thy royal throne." The world, bewitched by the prince of this world, is wont, it is true, to misuse that gift of God, the night, and through its dark shadows to go its own way of sinful pleasure, vice, and iniquity. But the Divine Saviour restored to night its due, as a time of rest and prayer for all those who obey His voice. The

wearied limbs are to be refreshed, the spirit to be unbent; quiet night throws a veil over all the thousand ensnaring and distracting impressions which excite the senses and the mind, and spreads deep repose and refreshing stillness over body and soul. And in the silence of night the Lord speaks to His own, and the recollected spirit rises in holy fervour to its God.

Thus the night of the world, and the night of the children of God, are as opposed to one another as darkness and light. Here, beneath the shadows of night, we find prayer and union with God, rest and peaceful slumber under His protection; yonder all is noise and confusion, glitter and glare, or deeds that shame the light. Whilst in the brilliantly-lighted streets of the capital, there is perpetual coming and going, carriages rolling by bearing gaily-dressed persons to every variety of entertainment; whilst the drawing-rooms are filled with elegant toilettes and inane chatter, the theatres with a gaping crowd, the bars and public-houses with thirsty guests and thick tobacco smoke, here we see at the sound of the monastery bells, dark forms with hoods drawn over their heads, passing gravely and silently by, to range themselves in two long rows along the cloisters.

It is the *statio*, the station, or assembling of the community before passing into the Church, a time of recollection and of preparation for prayer. He who is summoned to an audience with his king, or who has some important affair to treat of with the prime minister, would never rush straight from the street into their cabinet, he would first shake off the dust,

put his outer and inner man in order, and setting aside all thoughts and anxieties as to other matters, would give his whole attention to the clear and forcible representation of his case.

How, then, can we dare to appear before the King of Kings, our God, and our Judge, with levity and distraction, inattentive or unprepared, our heads filled with worldly thoughts and images of sense? The earthly prince may be deceived by our outward demeanour, but before the eye of God, and in the bright sunlight of His Omniscience our hearts lie open in all their misery and insignificance. Therefore does St Benedict warn us to appear "before the Lord of the universe, with all humility and purity of heart." Men often complain of irresistible distractions, or wonder that God does not hear their prayers, but have they duly prepared themselves beforehand, were they penetrated by the thought that they were about to stand before the Lord of eternal life and death?

At the *statio*, then, the monks assemble to prepare themselves prayerfully and silently for their prayers. The dark, cowled figures stand like statues on either side of the dimly-lighted cloisters. The Abbot gives the sign, and the monks walk in pairs to the Church. A young novice, kneeling at the door, hands holy water to the Abbot. All sprinkle themselves on entering, that all guilt may be washed away in the cleansing stream; "*Asperges me, Domine, hyssopo*," "Lord, sprinkle me with hyssop and I shall be cleansed." They go into the choir stalls on either side, and kneel down in silent prayer.

Whilst the community are thus entering the choir,

it would be gratifying to your guide to make you acquainted with each individual, and relate in what a marvellous way God has brought all these men together, from every variety of station, profession, and country, to unite them here in His service. But neither time nor place seem to him quite suitable, so we will not break the *silentium*, the *great silence*, which is now beginning its reign in the Monastery. Silence is a virtue which must adorn a monk, but at this time it becomes a solemn precept. "The monks must cultivate silence at all times, but especially during the hours of the night" (Holy Rule, c. xlii). This is the case in all monasteries, where the Rule of St Benedict is followed, and it gives a solemn consecration to the night. Even absolutely necessary things are expressed rather by signs than by words, and every noise is most carefully avoided. Thus all the senses should be hushed, and the interior ear alone should remain open, that it may be attentive to the voice of God, for in the silence of night, God speaks to our hearts.

The choir is lighted by only one lamp. In the midst stands a young cleric who begins, at a sign from the Superior, a lection from a spiritual book, whilst all sit down to listen. Ever since the days of our Holy Father, it has been the custom to read aloud every evening some passage from the works of the Fathers, or from the lives of the early monks. It is the last spiritual food at the end of the day. We can hear now that the reader, with a clear and distinct voice, is reading a portion of one of St Gregory's homilies. It is about

the account which the Lord demands from His servants: "No one can say that he has received no talents of which he need give an account, even the poorest has received somewhat, for of the smallest thing account will be required. This one has received understanding, which obliges him to work for God; that one has earthly possessions, which he can spend in works of mercy. . . . Let each, whoever he may be, consider well what it is he has received, and expect daily with awe, the return of his Lord, for behold, He is nigh, He is coming."

At a sign from the Abbot the reading is broken off, and the reader concludes with the customary: "*Tu autem Domine miserere nobis*," "But Thou, O Lord, have mercy on us."

All rise and begin compline, *completorium*, the monk's night prayers. St Benedict first introduced this part of the choir office into the Church. As the day was begun with prayer, so should it also end; as its first fruits belong to God, so should its last gift, and thus will the word of the Prophet be fulfilled. "Seven times a day I have given praise to Thee, and in the night I rose to confess to Thee." The psalms, hymns, lections, and prayers, of which compline is composed, all breathe a spirit of confiding, grateful trust in the protection of God. A grave sentiment of quiet sadness pervades it, for sleep is an image of death, and night typifies the lonely stillness of the grave. . . . "*Dormiam et requiescam*," "I will sleep and take my rest." The first blessing of the Abbot places us at once in this disposition. "May Almighty God grant us a quiet night and a perfect end." We are

surrounded by enemies, the evil spirits willingly avail themselves of the darkness of night, of the loneliness of the soul; in darkness, temptations assault us, and the devil seeks to terrify us. But Holy Church places powerful weapons in our hands. "*Sobrii estote et vigilate.*" . . . "Be sober, and watch." Your enemy is lurking around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, but watch and pray. The Lord is thy protector and thy refuge. His truth shall encompass thee as a shield. What hast thou to fear? He hath given His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." With the consciousness of danger, trust, and child-like confidence increases. "Shield us, O Lord, as the apple of an eye, hide us under the shadow of Thy wing." Could the Holy Ghost have chosen more touching comparisons to impress upon us a conviction of the Divine protection? How anxiously does a man guard his eye, screening it from the slightest danger. And yet, has He compared thy soul to the apple of an eye, and the paternal care of God with that of a hen, who gathers her young ones beneath her wings.

The hymn is sung, and then all kneel to receive the blessing of the Abbot. It is to them, as the blessing of God, a pledge of the Divine protection; no one would like to seek his quiet cell without this talisman. Any one who is unable to be present at these night prayers asks for this blessing, either beforehand or afterwards, by kneeling down before the Abbot, wherever he may be. All salvation comes to us from the Cross, therefore Holy Church always

blesses with the sign of the Cross, which carries a marvellous efficacy with it. The beautiful custom of children obtaining their father's or their mother's blessing before going to bed should be sacredly preserved; it is a mysterious bond, which keeps the children's hearts united with their parents in reverence and love. It is the father's privilege which he shares with the priest to give his blessing, and families in which even the grown-up sons and daughters reverently ask and receive the paternal blessing, are surely safe under the protection of God and of His holy angels.

And now the *Salve Regina* is intoned, sonorous voices rise once more above the graver tones of the recitation, to praise with joyous fervour the gentle Queen of Heaven, and to offer to her their last chant. How could we betake ourselves to rest, without having sung praise to her of whom was born our Redeemer, and who has thus brought us salvation? We greet her as "Our life, our sweetness and our hope," begging her to turn her eyes of mercy toward us, poor children of Eve, and to show unto us Jesus, the blessed fruit of her womb. The joyful strains resound through the broad nave of the Abbey Church, and floating upwards are lost in the vaulted roof.

It is once more sombre and still. The Litany of Loretto is being said, that wondrous, manifold appeal to the dear Mother of God, which the inventive love of her children has compiled, or rather, which the Holy Ghost has suggested to them in praise of His most pure spouse. Then follow the evening prayers; the protection of the holy angels

and the intercession of the Patron Saints of the Abbey are invoked, and the death of the holy Father St Benedict is commemorated. *Stans in oratorio.* "Standing before the Lord, fortified with His most holy Body and Blood, his disciples supporting his failing limbs, our dearest Father Benedict, with hands upraised to Heaven, breathed forth his soul amidst words of prayer."

As the sons have made the conduct of their Father throughout life their guide, so is a holy death like his the great object of their desires, and whilst reminding him at the conclusion of each day, of that hour which opened for him the gates of a blessed eternity, they at the same time implore his protection for that solemn moment which will decide their own future. Oh, that all sons and daughters would daily remember the hour of their parents' death, pray for their souls, and pray also that they may meet them again in a happy eternity.

The prayers in choir are ended; mute, and with bowed heads the monks still kneel in silent prayer. They recall once more before the eye of their mind, the day which has fled, and they take account with themselves of all their actions and omissions. Far from looking upon themselves as righteous, the Religious know full well how craftily the old enemy can contrive, even in the cloister, to sow cockle amongst the good grain which the Divine Hand has cast into their hearts. St Gregory has taught us that "He who does not daily purge his heart of the sins he has committed, be they never so slight, will speedily be deprived of the fruit of holy nourish-

ment." "He that is pure, let him become purer still," for he has to prepare a dwelling for Him who is holiness itself.

The Superior gives the sign to rise, and silently the monks disperse. The time that remains before retiring for the night is free for private devotion, and each one adopts what he prefers. They say necessity is the mother of invention. The further we advance in the spiritual life, the more do we realise how many and great are our needs, and those of others also, and we seize eagerly upon all the various ways and means that Holy Church, that tender mother, holds out to us. And our love even more than our need makes us inventive, and drives and urges us on, leaving our heart no rest until it has found Him whom it loves. Therefore do so many dusky figures kneel still in adoration before the Tabernacle, that mysterious dwelling of the heavenly guest, who is willing to be with us even to the end of the world, because "his delight is to be with the children of men." It is the hour when all business and all cares are laid aside, all that is of earth seems to fade away, and the soul in fervent devotion finds itself alone with its Creator and Redeemer. He who has knelt thus, in the silence of night, before the most Holy Sacrament, knows well how the heart there burns in loving rivalry with the flame of the perpetual lamp.

A whole tribe of suppliants have scattered themselves about the Church. The visit to the different altars, each one consecrated by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, is an old established custom in the

Order, and has been enriched by the Holy Church with indulgences. As a swarm of bees flying from flower to flower seeking pleasure and honey for their need, so do we see the brethren go from altar to altar, each taking care to make room quietly for the others. Most of them kneel before the privileged altar of our dear Lady, and there pour out their whole heart, which is overflowing with many and various desires both for themselves and for others. St Joseph has many clients, and this is not surprising, for the benevolence of our Saviour's foster father is as great as his sanctity, and every Religious could relate to us some special instance of it. Before the altar of the holy Father St Benedict all like to renew their vows, and to beg of the founder the grace of perseverance, and the spirit of prayer. Those novices yonder are visiting the image of St Placid their patron, and here are others venerating the Sacred Heart, that fountain of the love of the Incarnate God for men. Lay brothers, who have all day long been carrying the cross of heavy toil in the fields and gardens, are now seen making the "Way of the Cross" with their Saviour. Almost every Religious has some dear souls at home for whom to plead, and many a one is thinking (even whilst he endeavours to include all in his intercessions), "Where is such a one now, and is his angel near?"

By-and-bye the Church grows empty, and each goes quietly home into the monastery. Let us follow. We will kiss devoutly the foot of the statue of the Mother of God on the stairs; above, on the landing,

kneels with outstretched arms a venerable grey-bearded lay-brother at the foot of a colossal Crucifix. Now the Monastery has become even more still and noiseless. Only here and there in the wide passages, a dark figure glides past us. There is yet a light in the cells, in which the inmates, bent over the Holy Scripture, seek in the word of the Lord a message of peace for the coming night. One after another the lights are put out. No sound disturbs the profound quiet. It is night.

Night is a time of prayer; this we have been taught by the example of Jesus Christ, who oft-times watched whole nights in prayer, and His Word warns us to "Watch and pray." But night is also a time of repose, granted to us by the God of nature, and blessed and sanctified by Him, for "He giveth His beloved sleep" (Ps. cxxvi). Even whilst we are slumbering "beneath the shadow of His wings," He bestows His graces upon us. He appeared to Jacob in sleep, spoke to Joseph in Egypt by dreams, and gave His commandment to the slumbering foster-father of our Lord; and He Himself, the Lord of Nature, subjected Himself to its laws, and abandoned His wearied body to sleep.

Night, then, a time of prayer, is also a time of sleep. The two would seem to be irreconcilable. But we will distinguish and divide, so as to employ the precious time as best we may, and whilst seeking gain for the soul, still to give nature its due. Let us, then, go to school with the children of this world, who are, in their way, wiser than the children

of light. Look at that merchant, for instance, he is still at work, poring over his desk. Yonder shines the lonely lamp of the man of science, who hopes that the midnight hour may unravel for him some knotty problem. There, again, you may find the artist and the poet, who declare that their best ideas always come to them at night. The poor seamstress is sitting up there in her garret, to complete, with tired fingers, some urgent piece of work, for which she hopes to receive the scant earnings she so sorely needs. All these shun sleep; it must give place to work. And with them the sick also keep their weary vigil, longing vainly for sweet slumber; the soldier, too, is watching at his post, and the criminal on his evil way. These all keep their watch, urged either by a sense of duty, or by sheer necessity, or, perchance, by the desire of gain, by ambition, or by passion. Are all these "watching" in the sense of Holy Scripture? Are they deserving of the promise: "Blessed are they whom their Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching," or rather, may not to many of them be addressed that other awful saying: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

If, then, the children of this world so often deprive themselves of sleep for the sake of the goods of this life, can we be surprised if the Saints do the same for the sake of heavenly treasure, if they find their happiness in union with God, and their science in the knowledge of Him? St Anthony spent entire nights in divine contemplation, and exclaimed, sighing, when the day dawned: "O sun, why

dost thou come so soon to disturb me and deprive me of the light of the heavenly sun?" It is related of St Maurus, the disciple of St Benedict, that he had often recited the whole Psalter before the commencement of the Night Office. The holy empress St Matilda used to go at night, when all were asleep, to the Chapel, and there watch till the hour of Matins; St Margaret of Scotland used to rise at night to pray. And of our holy Father St Benedict we are told, how preventing the night watches, he stood at the window of his cell, with heart and eyes raised to Heaven, and rapt in wondrous vision, he was shown the whole world in one ray of supernatural light.

These were Saints, men moved by the Holy Spirit of God, whom we admire, but whose conduct we may not imitate of our own accord. As for us, we are bidden not to seek rashly after high things, but rather to walk by humble paths. We accept in obedience, simplicity, and gratitude, that which the Rule prescribes. And it will so order things, as to give to God that which is His, whilst granting also to nature that which it requires. In a monastery, one must simply follow the regulations of the house, and the example of the seniors, unless in anything exempted by the decision of Superiors. As for our friends in the world who are trying to lead a spiritual life, and are often in grave perplexity as to the manner in which their time should be spent, we may counsel them with the well-known adage: "*Accept—Thank—Fear.*" Give to nature the sleep it requires, neither more nor less; for it is said in

Holy Writ: "Love not sleep, that poverty oppress thee not," which may equally well be applied to spiritual poverty. Sanctify your sleep by saying: "O Lord my God, I offer Thee the rest which I am about to take, to Thy glory, and in union with the repose which our Saviour Jesus Christ deigned to take whilst on earth." Many recommend that we should think when going to sleep, "God knows whether I shall ever wake again," and so lay ourselves to rest as if in our grave. But we may also, happily and cheerfully, place ourselves in God's hands, as a child in its mother's arms, saying, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Many Saints had this practice, and obtained by it a happy death. Sprinkle yourself with holy water, and arm yourself with the sign of the Cross as with a shield, thus will you go to sleep beneath the shadow of the Cross.

Go to sleep praying, and if sleep does not come, take your rosary and pray yourself to sleep, and should you wake during the night, let your thoughts again seek God. In this way your sleep is turned to prayer: "I sleep, but my heart watcheth," "My soul hath sought Thee in the night." King David's resting-place was surrounded by sixty armed men, and Charlemagne slept in the midst of his faithful followers, twelve stood with naked sword at his head, twelve at his feet, twelve on his right hand, and twelve on his left. We need no such assemblage, and sleep far more securely, for the Angels of God keep guard around us; they stand, as the children's hymn has it, at our feet and at our head; at our

feet to ward off bodily dangers, at our head to preserve us from bad dreams, whilst they hover over us to bear away each breath we draw as a prayer to God.

But Religious have the obligation of consecrating a considerable portion of the night to prayer, so as to sanctify it as well as the day, to pray for the slumbering world, to make reparation for their sins, and, moreover, to maintain the circle of perpetual adoration. Therefore most Orders, bound to Divine Office, have Night Offices or Vigils, called *Matins*. In some places, especially in convents of nuns, this Office is said in the evening. The sons of St Francis, St Dominic, and many others, rise at midnight. St Benedict chose the early hours of the morning. According to those words of Holy Scripture concerning the just man, "his heart prevents the morning dawn to praise the Lord his Creator," he wishes that his monks should shake off their sleep, and begin their praise of God whilst the earth is still wrapped in darkness. This was also the custom of the early Christians. Pliny informed the Emperor Trajan that the Christians met together before daybreak to sing the praises of God, and Tertullian also relates how the Christians arose before the morning dawn. According to various traditions and interpretations of the Holy Rule, either the second, third, or fourth hour after midnight has been chosen by the Benedictine Order for the commencement of the Divine Office in choir. The ringing of the house bell awakes the sleepers. A Brother goes from cell to cell with a lantern, and

cries: "*Benedicamus Domino*," "Let us bless the Lord," and they answer, "*Deo Gratias*," "Thanks be to God." And more urgently than either bell or voice does the Lord Himself attract them to His service, to which, with holy zeal, each endeavours to come before the rest. Many are already down, and are again kneeling where we left them yesterday evening. "My soul hath desired Thee in the night, yea, and with my spirit within me, in the morning early I will watch to Thee" (Is. xxvi, 9).

The choir is brilliantly lighted, and invites us to the praise of God. "*Venite adoremus*," "Come, let us adore."

LAVDATE · DOMINVM · OMNES · GENTES ·
LAVDATE · EVM · OMNES · POPVLI ·
QVONIAM · CONFIRMATA · EST · SVPER · NOS ·
MISERICORDIA · EIVS ·
ET · VERITAS · DOMINI · MANET · IN · AETERNVM ·

CHAPTER V

THE DIVINE OFFICE

NIGHT still throws the aisles and arches of the Abbey Church into deep shadow, when from the brightly lighted choir there rises the sound of the Night Office of the monks — the solemn *divine praises*. Our visitors have followed us hitherto so patiently, that they will forgive their over-zealous guide if he rouses them from their slumbers at the same hour of the night as the monks, and causes the same stirring call to meet their ears: "*Benedicamus Domino*," "Let us praise the Lord." They have come here, not only to see the monastery, but also to gain some insight into the life and ways of its inhabitants. Later on, we will take a glimpse at the Brethren at their work, and share their meal in the refectory; but now, above all, we must observe them at their principal and most important occupation, and this will afford us an explanation of the fundamental principles of the monastic life, and enable us to understand fully its justification and true significance.

If we enter some great factory, and watch the

hundreds of whirring, clattering looms which are rapidly producing costly materials, we cannot understand what it is that regulates and sets in motion all this machinery, unless we have been shown the motive power. So now, let us examine what answers to the steam or the electricity, *i.e.*, the creative, motive principle of all monastic life and activity. It is prayer, prayer in common, the solemn Divine Office in choir, of which our holy Father St Benedict says "*Operi Dei nihil præponatur*," "Let nothing be preferred to the Work of God," thus does our legislator term the worship of God in community, because in a most true sense, it is both corporally and spiritually work for God and with God. To it *nihil*, nothing, is to be preferred, neither private prayer and contemplation, nor manual labour, nor study, nor active work for souls, preaching, instructing, giving missions, or anything else; *nihil præponatur*, there is nothing more important, more holy, more efficacious for a monk than the praise of God.

Is this the case nowadays? Is not our century one of action, of restless, unwearying activity, and not of quiet, contemplative prayer? And, indeed, is not all comprehension of such a life of prayer well-nigh lost? When a religious community is mentioned, one is asked first and foremost: What do they do? What is their occupation? as if they were manufacturers. Once when I informed a friend in the world of my intention of entering the cloister, he said, "I can understand that, it is so grand, so glorious, to give oneself entirely to the service of God, but don't go into a contemplative order. In these days work is

needed ; the question is, what is most for the common good? They say, of course, that they pray for all of us, but what do we get by that? We want to see them work and labour to make themselves useful." This is the opinion of a wide circle, but it is one suggested by a very superficial faith. St Benedict's declaration that nothing is to be preferred before the Work of God, is it then no longer true? Have we outlived it? Is God changed, or have we nowadays less need of Him? Can human activity supply the place of divine grace, and is it not solely by prayer that this is called down upon us?

When Israel fought against Amalec, Moses on the mountain was raising his hands in prayer ; it was not the fighting warriors that were victorious, but the power of prayer that vanquished the enemy, for as often as Moses let fall his hands, it was Amalec that got the upper hand. This type has often been used in favour of the Church suppliant as compared with the Church militant, and very justly ; and at this present time, as much as ever, nay, more than ever, do we stand in need of prayer, and of the solemn prayer in common of the Divine Office. But as the conception of this has well-nigh faded from men's minds, let us be permitted to set it forth in all its real significance, as regards itself, the monks, and finally, the Church and mankind in general. If I am successful in winning over our guests, and convincing them of this, I shall have laid a foundation for the recognition and due appreciation of the monastic life ; and all else that we may see and hear within

the cloister will be seen to take its rise from this source, and to receive all its life and strength from the same motive power.

The worship of God is the first and most important duty of the human race. Man is a rational being, is created to praise God, says St John Chrysostom, to offer to God the worship of the whole creation. Nor is it sufficient that each individual should comply with this duty by his own prayers. The relation of God to man, of the Creator to the creature, of the King of kings to His subjects, demands a solemn common worship, sacrifice and prayer, such service as Holy Church offers to God. The human race must offer to God socially, either as a united body or by due representation, its tribute of adoration, praise and thanksgiving. If each individual member of a corporation or of a parliament were to offer his homage to the King in private, this would by no means have the same significance as if all did so in common, or by special and solemn deputation. And this is what God requires, for it is written, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God;" "All the earth doth worship Thee;" "All the nations that Thou hast made shall come and adore before Thee, O Lord;" "Praise the Lord all ye nations, praise Him all ye peoples;" "Let all the earth bless the Lord, let it praise and exalt Him above all for ever." The great significance of this official praise of God may be recognised also by its sublimity. Next to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in which the work and fruit of our redemption is continually renewed and perpetuated, the Divine Office gives the greatest glory to God, and it is most

closely united and intimately connected with that sacrifice.

The Holy Mass is often called the sun of the spiritual life and the Choir Office is compared to the rays which surround it. Without the sun, which is Christ Himself, there would be no rays, but on the other hand, the rays announce and spread far and wide the glory of the sun, and it is by their means that we receive its beneficial light and heat. The Choir Office possesses a grandeur beyond all that is merely human, for it is divine, divine in its origin and source, divine in the Object of its praise, and divine in its form, which is of no human invention. The Holy Spirit lives, works, and speaks in the Church, and we have to thank Him for its contents, its arrangement, and its words, which He has inspired. It is the official prayer of the Church, and as she is the mystical Body of Christ, every breath in her body belongs to Him. He is her Head, and her prayer, her language, her voice are His, and therefore Divine. "*Laudat ipse seipsum Deus*," "He Himself praises Himself," says St Augustine. The due celebration of this worship is a supernatural office, it is the service of angels, and will be our blessed occupation for all eternity.

The sublimity of this solemn praise of God implies also its efficacy. Our Divine Lord Himself has said: "Wheresoever two or three are united in My Name, there am I in the midst of them," and again, "Whatsoever you shall ask in My Name, I will give it you." "Thy prayer," says St John Chrysostom, "is not of such efficacy when thou

prayest alone, as when thou prayest with thy brethren,' for as St Ambrose observes, "if many souls unite they become powerful, and God can not despise the prayers of a multitude."

They who sing psalms thus together, are as a well-ordered army in battle array, do violence to heaven, a violence most pleasing to God. "*Hæc vis Deo grata est.*" Individuals are as drops borne on by the force of the stream. Devotion in common arouses, vivifies, enkindles; it overcomes to a certain extent the tepid distractions of the individual, and unites him in the sonorous harmony of the choir, and thus the common prayer and praise resound like one voice rich and full-toned, well pleasing to God. It is the voice of the Church, of His Son, to which He cannot but listen, "*totius Ecclesiæ vox una*," "the one voice of the whole Church." This solemn praise of God has at all times been offered to Him by mankind. The ancient patriarchs offered sacrifice, and prayed surrounded by their families or their tribe. Moses regulated the service of God before the Tabernacle, appointed to the priests their office, which was shared by the tribe of Levi. Levites were the chosen singers, who interceded for the people. David's first care when, after glorious victories, he had established his kingdom, was to order a becoming worship for the sanctuary of the Lord. He chose out four thousand singers from amongst the Levites, whom he divided into twenty-four choirs, and he himself, the hero king with golden harp in hand, intoned the festal hymns and psalms at the head of the grand choir of priests. "As often as the

sun rose in the east on Jerusalem, or sank behind the mountains of Sion, psalms and musical instruments accompanied the morning and evening sacrifice." And when his son, the wise King Solomon, had completed the building of the magnificent Temple, he stood in the presence of the whole people of Israel, before the Altar of the Lord, and stretched forth his hands toward heaven. Then, kneeling on both knees, he offered a solemn prayer of consecration. He praised, gave thanks, and prayed, and the whole people joined in adoration with him, and in sacrifice to the Lord. And under the new covenant, of which the old was but a shadow and a type, should not this adoring worship of God find a yet grander and more glorious expression? The Church has entered on the heritage of the Synagogue; has received from it the precious treasure of Holy Scripture; what were but dark prophetic sayings, have become the accomplished works of God, in the fulfilment of which she rejoices to-day. At the birth of the world's Redeemer, angelic choirs intoned their hymns of praise, the poor shepherds joined in them, and now they resound, without interruption, throughout the whole world. Christ, the Divine King and Priest, not only offered to His Heavenly Father a sacrifice such as alone was worthy of him, but He worshipped Him also, with the choir of His Apostles, by psalms and hymns, and so He still worships Him wherever Christians are gathered together in His Name, for He is with them and in them till time shall be no more.

When the psalmody died away in the desecrated Temple, it awoke in the joyful choirs of the early Chris-

tian congregations, and following in the footsteps of the Apostolic missionaries, it spread throughout Asia Minor and Greece, extended all along the coast of the Mediterranean, and found an echo in the deserts of Egypt. The subterranean vaults of the Catacombs resounded with the Christian hymns; and when the spell of heathen domination was broken, there sprang up gorgeous temples and grand cathedrals, in which the praises of God were sung with all solemnity by priests and faithful. Soon the Church was reckoned no more by congregations, but by nations; it became no longer possible for all the faithful to assemble together daily for the praise of God, and they entrusted this duty to the priesthood. For them, therefore, this Divine Office, or recitation of the Breviary, became the first and most important duty. All the thousands of priests who, the wide world round, daily—nay, from the differences of time, ceaselessly—recite their hours in the name of Holy Church, form, as it were, one single choir, one sounding harp, in unison with the never-ceasing intercession and praise of the Divine High Priest. The whole intention, the construction and arrangement of the Divine Office, indicates the element of community; it is founded on alternation of singing, and on the united action of the Clergy and the people, as is distinctly expressed even in the Holy Sacrifice itself; "*publica est nobis et communis oratio*," "we have a public and common worship."

In the Holy Sacrifice, however, this union is purely spiritual. Priests and people meet together, it is true, wherever it is possible, for prayer in common,

and it is still kept up in the cathedrals and collegiate churches of Catholic lands, but this does not satisfy the Church, who desires that God should be honoured by united, solemn, uninterrupted choral worship, and for this purpose a special order of men is required. It is true that the evangelical counsels are practised by the priesthood, inasmuch as they have embraced poverty (at least in spirit), promised obedience to their bishop, and vowed perpetual chastity, but even this is not enough. The endeavour to attain perfection, which has been confirmed by the three vows, must find its due representation in a special state of life, or Holy Church would be deprived of her choicest blossoms, her most delicious fruits.

Thus arose the necessity for the religious state, the members of which, both men and women, should be consecrated in an especial manner to God, and belong to Him alone. They are the followers of the early Christian communities, of which it was said, "they were all together and had all things in common . . . continuing daily with one accord in the temple . . . praising God." This early Christian community-life in poverty, obedience, and continual prayer, was never to cease throughout the Church as she grew and spread over all the earth, and it continued its existence in the cloister. There, above all, should the inextinguishable flame of the Divine praise be fed, there be found the mouthpiece and the harp of Holy Church. The cloister is not only a rallying point for all Christian people, a model of Christian life, but also a glowing flame of fervent

prayer, the perpetual lamp ever burning to the glory of God. This then was the first and chief task, the reason for community life, the element of union among its members, so that we could expect them rather to pray together without living together, than ever to give up prayer in common, as, in fact, Carthusians live in separate dwellings, and hermits dwell in cells apart from one another, yet all meet together for choral prayer.

This call to prayer was understood of old by the dwellers in the Eastern Lauras, and the fathers of the Egyptian deserts, as well as by the monks of the early monasteries in Italy and Gaul, but it was first brought out in its full beauty and significance by our Holy Father St Benedict. He grasped the idea of the liturgical life with all the ardour and strength of a heart devoted to God, he carried it out with the talent for organisation of a Roman patrician, and he made his Order the herald of this scheme for the solemn worship of God, the representation of the prayer of the Church. Thirteen chapters of his Holy Rule treat of the Divine Office, and we may well say the end and aim of it is to make each individual monk, who for his own sanctification has sought to become a member of the monastic family, so utterly give himself up to it as to be but one more voice in the harmonious choir of the brotherhood who have undertaken to represent upon earth the adoration that Jesus Christ Himself ever pays to His Heavenly Father. All turns upon this, the glorious ceremonies, the splendid vestments, the lofty vaulted temples, and the sonorous chant

which resounds within them. The Benedictine monk rarely goes out into the world ; his task is to glorify God in the temple of His Majesty, and in so doing to sanctify himself. Well, therefore, could the great legislator say, "*Nihil præponatur*," "Nothing shall be preferred before the Work of God," and for this reason it should be looked for as a sign of true vocation, whether the newcomer "be zealous for the service of God," "*Si sollicitus sit ad opus Dei.*"

Wholly engrossed in the dignity and grandeur of this service, the choir monk lives but for this sacred obligation. Not single days from time to time, but the entire year becomes a prolonged and varied festival, which has for him an ever newer and deeper meaning. Penetrating more and more into the mystical depths of the liturgical prayers and ceremonial, he thus sanctifies both his outer and inner man, and, like the angels, who in the presence of the Most Holy Trinity, sing unceasingly their glorious Trisagion, so does he wholly devote himself, with all his powers and faculties, to the service of the Most High. Like them, he never leaves his place before the ever-present God, the choir stall is his home. His constant employment forms him into a man of God, into an instrument of God, apt and ready at once for every task, for every charge ; and there is no labour from which he would withdraw himself if it were imposed upon him by obedience. These most glorious occupations, which take him into the heavenly courts and number him amongst the chamberlains of his Sovereign Lord, ennoble his whole being, and give to him that quiet dignity, that refined

simplicity, that humble recollectedness, that fervent self-devotion, which the service of the King of kings demands. O happy and blessed vocation! O gracious choice! "*Beatus quem elegisti et assumpsisti*," "Blessed is he whom Thou hast chosen and taken to Thee, he shall dwell in Thy courts" (Ps. lxiv. 5).

But the Divine Office is not alone a school of sanctification for each individual monk, it is the very marrow and heart of the Order. As the saints of God, so the different Orders in the Church have each their peculiar mission in the Divine economy. Our holy Father St Benedict first brought into settled form the Day Office of the Church, which, having been in use ever since the time of the Apostles, had been continually developing into greater completeness. He arranged the psalms, lections, and prayers, especially for his own monks, but always according to the spirit and the decrees of the Church of Rome, "*sicut psallit Ecclesia Romana*," "as the Roman Church sings." The Church supported his work by her authority, and illustrious popes, like St Gregory the Great (himself a son of St Benedict), regulated by it the Divine Office of the whole Church. The diffusion of the solemn praise and worship of God was thus the life-long task of the Benedictine Order, and at the same time the cause of its development and rapid extension. The Order stands and falls with the Choir Office: its source of fertility is in the liturgical life, with the decline of which its own goes hand in hand. It is the chosen representative of the Church, in her quality of worshipper of God. Not only have priests found in our abbeys a place for

spiritual recollection suited to the work of their vocation, but the people also, as children of the Church, have drawn from this common source, devotion and grace. Thousands of monasteries, cities of God, fortresses of Holy Church, made the whole of Europe a garden of the Lord. They were as the salt of the earth during the Middle Ages, so long as they remained true to their vocation. They were models alike for the family and the state, nurseries of the arts and sciences, but only so long as these were planted on the soil of the liturgical life. In those ages of holy zeal, men wished to offer Almighty God a perpetual adoration, and to this end there were Monasteries in which three choirs followed one another in unbroken succession. At Bangor and Iona, in the Monastery of St Boniface at Fulda, at Meissen, and many more in Saxony, the *laus perennis* resounded uninterruptedly by day and night. In the last-named Monastery it was thus continued during three centuries. Later on, as a crown of stately Abbeys began to encircle the earth, each took up the task from the other, at the call of the rising day-star, and thus was their adoration truly perpetual. Then other Orders came to join in the great song of praise, Augustinians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, and thus was perfected a harmony most pleasing to God, which rose ever before His throne as a sacrifice of sweet savour.

It may well be said that the history of the Middle Ages was materially influenced by the cloister, that the well-being or the evil lot of nations, their triumphs or their defeats, their peaceful development, or their

internal disquietude, were closely bound up with the ebb and flow of their religious life, and especially with the condition of their monasteries. And this is why princes were often the founders, benefactors, and supporters of the abbeys of their country, from whence they looked for the help of prayer in life and death, and in which it was their earnest desire that their bodies might one day be laid to rest, so that even in death they might reap their share of blessing from the choral prayer which re-echoed round their tomb.

In order to understand aright this mysterious action, this power which guides the fate of nations, as well as of individuals, it is necessary to have a true and lively faith in the power of prayer. It was the monks who, by their intimate union with the Church Triumphant, drew down the blessing of Heaven on the Church Militant. They were the most faithful sons of the vicegerents of Christ, whose authority they upheld, the support of the bishops, who were mostly nominated from their ranks, the counsellors of princes, the friends and benefactors of the people. When, once upon a time, the Emperor Charles V. was overtaken with his fleet on the African coast by a violent storm, and it was feared that the ships would be lost, he suddenly asked what time it was. "Midnight," was the reply. "Oh, then the danger is past," said the Emperor, "for at this hour in Spain all the monks and nuns rise for prayer."

When this faith grew dim, when false philosophy and revolutionary movements, shaking both altar and throne, undermined the very foundations of Christian

belief, when all these distressing novelties penetrated even into the cloister, then indeed these citadels of God's glory, attacked by foes both within and without, could not but fall. That sense of spiritual joy which makes the glad heart sing psalms was lost; with its loss the bonds of discipline and childlike obedience were relaxed. In many countries the Religious Orders thus degenerate were no longer worthy of their high calling, and the confusion within the Church, the diminution of faith, and the increasing licentiousness of the people, demanded new and different instruments of divine grace. The time of tranquil possession was at an end, and was succeeded by a period of struggle after the highest good. The Church, recognising at all times the needs of the age, brought forth, in her maternal fecundity, men of action and of holy zeal, who, banding themselves together into new Orders and Congregations, threw themselves into the breach to reconquer and to save the threatened liberty of the Church. They had no time for the Choir Office, work was their watchword, consuming zeal for souls made them forgetful of themselves, and their mission required a freedom of action which chafed at the confinement of the quiet cloister.

Were the monks then set aside for ever? Is it true that the Choir has become superfluous, that it has no longer any power, any significance? *No*, indeed! Instruction, education, missions, care of souls in all its phases, are not in themselves sufficient to uphold and increase the kingdom of God on earth; all these require the support of prayer, of united prayer, which is a bond of union between Heaven and

earth. This prayer is not only one of the adornments of the Church, but also one of her most powerful weapons, of which she stands even more and more in need. Of what use is the courage, the contempt of death of the warriors of Israel, if Moses keeps not his hands uplifted in prayer? By prayer men obtain not only the aid of Heaven, a supernatural strength in their struggles, but instruction and direction for their moral life. "Wherever this public and ceremonious worship of God has been abolished, there" says a French theologian, "as a natural consequence, the people fall back into a state of awful barbarism and the most unheeding ignorance of all natural and social duties."

By the sympathy of a people with the liturgical worship of God, we may estimate their moral and religious state. This was the case even in the classic days of paganism, and it continued to be so during the palmiest days of Christendom. St Jerome relates that the inhabitants of Palestine used to sing verses of the psalms alternately during their labour in the fields, and St Ambrose tells us that people of all ranks, both men and women, were in the habit of assisting at Matins on Sundays and Festivals in the Monastery Church. This pious custom still continued in the days of faith, and rich were the blessings it drew down upon the Christian family and the community at large. We remember how Mabel, the mother of St Edmund of Canterbury, used to rise every night with her little son to assist at Matins in the Abbey Church of Abingdon, and how English monarchs like Canute, St Edward, and the gentle Henry VI. loved to assist at the Choir Office in the

Monasteries of Ely, Westminster, and Bury. St Cæsarius of Arles used to exhort his people to go at night to Matins, and many ancient canons required that the faithful should attend Vespers as well as Mass; several synods in the time of Charlemagne ordained that they should join in the psalms and responsories. Our own glorious King Alfred the Great always carried a breviary about with him: 'Praise the Lord, kings of the earth, and all people, princes, and all judges of the earth" (Ps. cxlviii). Nowadays, this true appreciation of the Choir Office has been lost, and it is no longer the custom to take part in it; hence the great and deplorable ignorance on ecclesiastical subjects that exists amongst the people generally, and which extends often to highly cultured circles. Few can understand the Latin prayers of Holy Mass, and yet every educated person ought to be sufficiently instructed in the language of the Church to be able to follow the Liturgy. In the Middle Ages it was familiar to all educated people, and even the peasants and townsfolk knew many psalms by heart. "The psalms are easily remembered when they are often sung," said Bishop Nicetius. In Italy and France even now we find the people singing the psalms at Vespers, but in England the practice is well-nigh lost, the glorious chant is all but forgotten. And yet, once upon a time, when the civil power sought to root it out, the people even used force to preserve it. The men of Devon and Cornwall rose in the time of Edward VI., clamouring for the restoration of Matins, Mass, Evensong and Litany, the ancient services they had

learned to love. They were, indeed, but echoing the demand of the heroes of the Pilgrimage of Grace. Their pious outcries were only stifled by the violence of foreign mercenaries. How much of lively emotion, of ennobling sentiment, and of heavenly consolation is lost to a family and to every member of it, when they cannot understand the prayers of the Church, no longer care to follow the liturgical offices, and for the most part fall back upon the sickly and ennervating food of the sentimental books of devotion which crowd the book-market by the dozen.

One often hears it said, "Our health is too weak, we cannot bear such exertion, this getting up at night and the chill of the cold Churches." It is true our bodies are weak, but are not our souls still more so? Do you not see the brilliantly lighted public houses, with stifling atmosphere and uproarious noise within? Do you not hear the sound of dance and revel which recklessly disturb until late into the night all those around that fain would sleep? Do you not know many a gentleman who can only tear himself from his repose on a Sunday morning in time for an eleven o'clock Mass, and yet who, were it a question of grouse-shooting, would willingly forego his night's rest, and be on the moor by five o'clock in the morning? But now, thank God, a purer breeze is wafted toward us, already a more lively faith, a more religious spirit, begins to appear. With a growing faith, its outward expression will again come to life. Instead of the empty, cold services of a so-called "enlightened age" our Churches will once more array themselves in warmer colouring, and through their richly-decked

naves will again resound the time-honoured prayers and chants of a Christian past, full of the Holy Spirit of God.

Already there are many pious souls who not only use the Missal for their daily Mass, but also rejoice to assist at the day Office of the Church whenever circumstances will permit. Moreover, there are now many highly cultured men and women, who have applied themselves with pious industry to the due understanding of the Liturgy, and who delight in its rich perfume. The founder of a glorious abbey in Belgium is present every day with his family at Conventual Mass and Vespers, and gentlemen of all ranks, even officers in uniform, are often to be seen among the guests in our foreign abbeys following the prayers of the choir, and we are acquainted with a great manufacturer, with 2000 workmen in his employ, who says regularly every day the Roman Breviary.

Interest in the Liturgy is rapidly growing and spreading. Zealous priests and good books, such as Dom Guéranger's well-known work, help people to comprehend it. But, before all else, this is the task of the abbey, to enhance once more the grandeur of the Liturgical Offices. The Benedictine Order must be ever more and more conscious of this, its great mission, and setting aside as secondary all other exterior work, must give the first place to the solemn Office of the Choir, and by furthering with holy zeal the solemn service of the altar, show itself once more worthy of its great forefathers. This is felt even in the world, as is proved very clearly by the desire for such centres of prayer and praise, the demand for

monasteries, and the lively interest taken in the divine worship and the increasing appreciation of it, wherever they have sprung up. From far and near the people flock to them, to listen to the sacred chant, to delight in the splendour and dignity of the divine worship, and to feel their hearts borne up towards God by the sounds of jubilant and supplicating prayer.

Let us, then, after these preliminary explanations, enter the Abbey Church to assist at Matins.

The monks are kneeling silently in their places. They prepare themselves for prayer by prayer. They recollect themselves, banish all vain, irreverent, and wandering thoughts, that with fervent heart and pure lips they may worship the Lord of Hosts. They offer their prayer for the wants of Holy Church, for the whole of Christendom, for special intentions both public and private, and they unite it with that of the Incarnate God, and of the saints. Then the Abbot gives the signal with the little wooden hammer lying before him. All rise, greet the Abbot with a respectful inclination, and then, bowing down profoundly, say the *Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria*, and *Credo* in silence. At a second sign they rise, turn towards the altar, and the Hebdomadary (*i.e.*, the Father whose turn it is for the week) sings with a loud voice, signing himself with the cross while he does so, "*Deus in adjutorium meum intende*," "O God, incline unto mine aid;" and the choir responds: "*Domine ad adjuvandum me festina*," "O Lord, make haste to help me." It is the cry of our weakness to the almighty power of God. Conscious that we can do nothing, least of all so great a work as the praise of God, by our own

strength, and well aware that the evil spirits will do all they can to disturb the divine service, we cry to our ever ready helper, and shield ourselves with the sign of the Cross, before which the enemy will flee away in terror. This call for help is concluded with the *Gloria Patri*, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost." These words sum up the whole of the Divine Office, and its end. The glory of God, which the "Heavens declare," the praise of the Most Holy Trinity, which is ceaselessly sung by Cherubim and Seraphim, shall here find an echo from our lips, unworthy though they be.

But this feeling of insufficiency increases still more as prayer begins, and once again the Hebdomadary commences: "O Lord, open Thou my lips," and the choir responds, "And my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." "Yes, open Thou my lips, sanctify them, purify them, as Thou didst purify the lips of the prophet Isaias with a burning coal; place Thy word in my mouth, and praise Thyself by the voice of Thy servant." This cry for help is repeated three times, and then the Cantor intones the 3rd Psalm, by which (freshly roused from slumber) we place ourselves with the utmost confidence beneath the protection of the Most High, that He may preserve us from the enemies around us.

Two of the younger monks now go to the desk in the middle of the choir, and with fresh, clear voices intone the *Invitatory*. This is for the Office what the text is for the sermon, the leading idea of the Office of the Feast, or of the day, and the invitation to adore God: "*Regem Confessorum dominum, venite*

adoremus, "The King of Confessors, O come let us adore." This is repeated in alternation between each verse of the 94th Psalm, with which Holy Church day by day begins the praise of God. "Come," says this glorious Psalm, "let us praise the Lord with joy, let us gladly sing to God our Saviour. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise before Him with Psalms." This is the joyous cry with which the Church arouses her children, the heavenly Bridegroom His Bride, and ever since apostolic times it has sounded day by day, as a supernatural call, awakening all from the silence of night to the adoring praise of the Most High. By this time the flame of devotion has been kindled in every heart, the keynote for the divine praise has been struck, so that holy fervour may break forth in the hymn, by which we joyfully celebrate the mystery of the feast we are keeping. The ecclesiastical hymns, for the most part centuries old, are masterpieces of Christian poetry, composed by pious singers filled with the purest love of God. With this hymn is concluded the introductory portion of Matins, which on festivals is either entirely, or in part, sung.

Matins, formerly called Vigils, because it was essentially a night Office, is divided, on most festivals, into three nocturns, the first two of which each consist of six psalms and four lections with responsories; the third is composed of three canticles and four lections. After the psalms of each nocturn are said the *Pater Noster* and the Absolution, and before each lection is said the Benediction. The number of the psalms, twelve, indicated the twelve hours of the

night, which we sanctify to the Lord, or the twelve gates of the eternal city, and this mystical number has been in use since the time of the Fathers of the desert.

And what in fact are these psalms which form the principal part of the ecclesiastical worship? Composed three thousand years ago, they were used by the Synagogue, which looked forward with eager longing to the coming of Him of whom they spoke in mystic and prophetic utterance. In the fulness of time Christ came, and He also used the psalms from the crib to the Cross, and since then His Church continues by them her glorious hymn of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. They rise as the outward flame of the inward fire which the Redeemer would fain enkindle in all hearts, as the earthly echo of that celestial harmony which is unceasingly heard around the throne of the Most High. The psalms are the work of the Holy Ghost, but in order to make them known, God chose out a man after His own heart, and placed a harp in his hand that he might evoke their unearthly strains. This was David the king. Rarely had mortal man such vast experience of the vicissitudes of life as had the Psalmist. There is no joy that he did not taste, no sorrow by which his soul was not wrung; his life comprised within its course every emotion which the human heart can feel. Raised from the lowly condition of a shepherd boy to the high station of a great king, he tasted all the joys and sorrows of life, and having fallen into the abyss of grievous sin, he rose once more to the loftiest heights of virtue and of sanctity. Thus, if he experienced all the anguish of

penance, he learnt also all the rapture of the most fervent love of God, and so every emotion of the human heart passed through his great and noble soul, and found expression in those divinely inspired canticles, the psalms. There is no sentiment, no frame of mind that they do not portray and turn again towards God. Their words are ever fresh, ever new, a poetry of undying beauty.

And these psalms, given to us by the Spirit of God, were on the lips of the child Jesus during His hidden life with Mary and Joseph at Nazareth. He sang them with His disciples, He made use of them in His passion and in His last heartrending words upon the Cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? Into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." So the psalms continued to be the prayer, the voice of Holy Church; by them her children implore light and consolation, medicine in all their maladies, weapons and defence against every need; for their mystical depths contain the most consoling secrets of our faith. Our forefathers recited these psalms, the saints pondered over them, and the martyrs were strengthened by them. Oh, if only Christian people would as of old value these treasures aright, how greatly would they serve to promote a true spirit of faith. The psalms are recited antiphonally, *i.e.*, alternately by the two sides of the choir, each being preceded and terminated by an antiphon which connects it with the leading idea suggested by the feast, and to each is added the *Gloria Patri*, which serves to direct it heavenwards. "To God alone be glory," "*Tibi sacrificabo hostiam*

laudis, psallite Deo nostro psallite, psallite Regi nostro psallite," "I will sacrifice to Thee the sacrifice of praise. Sing praises to our God, sing ye praises to our King." At the *Gloria Patri*, the monks rise and incline profoundly. There is a pious belief that all distractions which may have crept in during the psalm may be atoned for at the recitation of this act of praise to the Most Holy Trinity. It took its rise from a beautiful legend of a dead monk having once appeared to one of his brethren, telling him that he would have had to expiate much inattention at prayer, but having always said the *Gloria Patri* with great devotion, he had on that account been liberated. St Francis, too, had the greatest esteem for the *Gloria Patri*, and said once to a brother, "Study well the *Gloria Patri*, thou wilt find therein the substance of the Holy Scriptures."

The lections are the instructive part of the Office. In olden times those of the first nocturn were taken from the Old Testament, and those of the second from the New. At present, the readings of the first are from Holy Scripture, those of the second from the life of the saint whose festival it is, whilst those of the third nocturn are taken from the homilies of the Fathers on the Gospel. What can afford richer matter for our contemplation than these lessons? They are introduced with a blessing, and when the reader has concluded, he says: "*Tu autem Domine miserere nobis*," "But Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us." The choir recites the responsories, which are composed of portions of psalms and of festive antiphons.

These different parts of the Office, so richly

varied, form a harmonious whole, like to some richly woven carpet spread out to the honour of the saints, and to the glory of God who sanctified them. It is no monotonous monologue, but a prayer full of dramatic life. The choir sings and recites in alternation, as with one voice. The Lectors have their place in the midst of the choir, the Abbot gives the blessings, the Hebdomadary says the prayers. The choir rises and turns towards the altar to greet our Lord. They then make a profound bow and seat themselves in the stalls, covering their heads with their hoods. It is not to be wondered at, if during such worship as this, in which body and soul unite in the service of God, many devout and holy souls should have been wrapt in ecstasy, that St Gertrude should have seen Christ our Lord in person, taking the place of the Superior at the Divine Office, that St Bernard should have seen angels assisting at it, for truly it is the Office of angels, and it is their glorious functions that are being here fulfilled, although, alas, with much of earthly imperfection.

Therefore does our Holy Father St Benedict say: "If we believe that the divine Presence is everywhere, and that the eyes of the Lord behold both bad and good in all places, especially and without any doubt, do we believe this, when we assist at the Work of God; therefore serve the Lord with fear, and sing wisely, for ye sing in the presence of His angels."

The lections of the third nocturn ended, the Abbot intones the *Te Deum*, the Ambrosian canticle of praise, which is sung by the whole choir with great fervour. Legends tell us of pious monks from whose

lips there went forth flames when they sang this unearthly hymn of praise, so full of holy joy and deepest thanksgiving. Then comes the Gospel of the feast, which is sung by the Abbot, whilst the acolytes hold torches and the book, and the whole choir stand facing him to listen with attention to the word of God. The *Te decet laus* in honour of the Most Holy Trinity, and the proper collect of the day, terminate Matins.

According to present custom, Lauds follow immediately, though in the time of St Benedict a pause was made, which was longer or shorter according to the season of the year, so that Lauds (then called Matins) might commence with the dawn. The Hebdomadary once more begins the "*Deus in adjutorium meum intende*"; then follow a succession of psalms and antiphons, marked by a spirit of joy and thanksgiving, which culminated in those jubilant songs of praise, the *Benedicite* and the *Laudate*, which have given to this hour its name of "Lauds." These psalms, the hymn of praise which was sung by the three youths in the furnace of Babylon as they stood unharmed in the midst of the flames, and the three united psalms of praise of the Israelites returning from the Babylonian captivity, belong to the most glorious utterances of rejoicing praise with which the Holy Ghost ever inspired the human heart or opened human lips. The whole creation, from the heavenly host to the helpless infant, the kings and judges of the earth, the priests and servants of God, the stars, the winds, the snow and ice, rain-storm and lightning flash, the beasts of the forest, the fishes of the sea, the whole kingdom of

Nature—all are called upon to praise God, all are offered up to Him. Thus do the praises of God echo and re-echo jubilantly throughout the choir, and as if freshly awakened Nature were eager to respond to the invitation, the first rays of the rising sun stream through the painted windows, and play upon the ornaments of the altar, while the little birds outside take up the joyous chant, and sing their greeting to the Lord.

The psalms being ended, the "little chapter" from Holy Scripture is read, with its responsory intoned by the Cantor. Then follow the Office hymn, versicle and response, the antiphon proper to the feast, and the canticle *Benedictus*, wherein, moved by the Holy Ghost, Zacharias announces the approaching advent of the Messias, the Redeemer, who, mindful of His promise, comes to visit His people.

There was once a monk of Citeaux, around whose head a flame was seen to play whilst he was singing the *Benedictus*, and when questioned, he replied: "I was thinking that if I were in heaven, it is thus I would desire for ever to praise God with all the Angels." Blessed Stephen of Tournay says of the same monastery of Citeaux: "They celebrate the Divine worship there with such dignity and devotion that one could believe one heard angels' voices in their choir; by their psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles they constrain one to praise God in imitation of the angels."

In the early days of monastic life, no manuals of meditation were required; the Divine Office sufficed the brethren, and afforded them material for rapturous contemplation.

In this contemplation our fathers used to penetrate deeply into the mysteries of the sacred word, and they were wont to draw forth from it ever new treasures of light and grace, which caused their hearts to overflow with holy enthusiasm and delight.

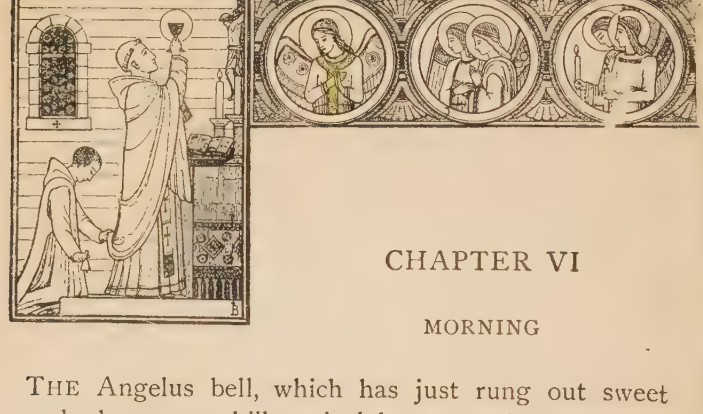
The Divine Office, the prayer of the choir, is not only the lifelong duty of the monk, it is also his school of sanctity, and of the interior life. A monastery in which the Divine Office is kept up according to the spirit of our Holy Father must needs flourish, and bring fruits of virtue to maturity. But it is work, and hard work. Prayer is work, honourable, useful, and necessary, requiring the exercise of all our powers, for it directs both body and soul in the service of God. "And let us so stand to sing in the choir," says the Holy Rule, "that mind and voice may accord together." "Let us so *stand*"; that is, place ourselves in such a posture as may further recollection of spirit; the whole man must pray. And this is why the Divine Office in choir has somewhat of the dramatic* about it. It affords little scope for individuality,—it is an official prayer offered in common. The whole choir turn, bend, kneel, rise up as one man, with a rhythmic regularity inspired by the most lively devotion. The intensity of this devotion will differ, no doubt, in various souls. St Bernard once saw an angel writing down the prayers of the monks, some with letters of gold, some of silver, others of black ink, or colourless water, according as they differed in value before God. But it is always a consolation for the weak and faltering to know that their prayer,

* See Ward's *Life of Cardinal Wiseman*, vol. i, p. 363.

united with and borne up by the strong, will reach the ear of God; just as their voices, chiming in with the rest, are wafted upwards in one common harmony. It is as when the eagle bears its young ones aloft upon its outstretched wings to accustom them by degrees to behold the sun.

Lauds conclude with one of those glorious Collects, which are so inimitable in their brevity and simplicity, in their truth and depth; then are commemorated the souls of the faithful departed, and the absent brethren. Our Lady's antiphon has once more been heard, and now all is still in the choir.

The monks are kneeling in silent prayer, giving thanks, and asking pardon for their mistakes and distractions. Then a bell is heard. It is the Angelus. The Abbot rises with the brethren, and they leave the choir, bearing the perfume of the Divine Office with them to their quiet cells.



CHAPTER VI

MORNING

THE Angelus bell, which has just rung out sweet and clear, over hill and dale, not only announces the great mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption at the beginning of another day, but also serves as an invitation from the cloister to the outer world to unite in praising our Lord, and in offering up to Him the morning sacrifice. At the sound of the bells, the quiet valley wakes up, and along the footpaths from the village and outlying hamlets, little groups of the faithful may be seen hastening towards the church. Like the holy women of Jerusalem who, early on Easter morning, betook themselves to the grave of our Lord to bring Him their spices and rich ointments, these faithful souls come to seek the body of their Lord, and to bring Him the aroma of their devotion, the unction of their fervent prayers.

In the nave of the Church still lingers that dim twilight so favourable to recollection; each one seeks his accustomed place, and opens the door

of his heart to the rays of the newly-rising sun of grace.

The sacristy door opens, and a company of priests come forth, vested for Mass, their heads covered with the white amice, and disperse, each preceded by a serving-brother, to the different altars, which are already lighted up. At twelve different points, on twelve altars of the Abbey Church, the same drama is being enacted. As a many-sided crystal mirrors forth in manifold reflections the same image, so do we see on every side the same great action, everywhere the same words, the same movements, the same great function is performed, the same miracle is wrought; it is a visible image of the oneness of the Sacrifice. Here we see represented before us what is at the same time taking place on thousands of altars. Everywhere there is the same priest, Christ the eternal High Priest Himself, Who, by His representative, offers the same sacrifice to the same God, His heavenly Father. This thought of the universality of the Church, which, with the ever-revolving morning hour, ceaselessly renews the sacrifice of atonement, the consciousness that everywhere the same Body of Christ is elevated by the trembling hands of the priest, everywhere the same Most Precious Blood flows ruby-red in the Chalice—this knowledge is indeed truly overpowering. To the eye of faith each altar becomes a Calvary; we hear the blows of the executioner's hammer, and the sighs of the Crucified, the little bell rings, and lo! His holy Body is there, lifted up between earth and heaven. And so one Mass follows another,

and the faithful who assist at them come and go but the sacrifice remains ever the same. Amidst this fulness, this lavish superabundance of grace which is here poured forth with such divine bounty the heart cannot but realise in all its intensity the bliss of belonging to the Church, of having a full and just claim to its inheritance. The faithful assist, kneeling before any one of the various altars to which they may be guided by a special attraction or a special need. They have perchance a devotion to some particular saint, or they may have asked for a Mass to be said for some private intention, for the success of some undertaking, for the recovery of one sick, for some dear soul departed, and they could not pray better than in union with the all-prevailing sacrifice which the priest is offering for them. They may not have time to hear a whole Mass, but at least they may greet their dear Lord, and receive His blessing on the cares and duties of the day.

At the high altar the Holy Mass has been continued as far as the Communion. The priest turns towards the clerics, novices, and brothers, who are kneeling in several rows on the steps of the altar, and are saying the *Confiteor*. He holds in his hand the body of the Lord, shows it, as did John the Baptist, whose very words he echoes in the "*Ecce Agnus Dei; ecce qui tollit peccata mundi*," then reverently places it on the lips of the brethren, as in a tabernacle. He next bears the heavenly food to the people of the congregation, who kneel at the altar rail, and divides amongst them the miraculous Bread of the faithful.

There are a great number of pious people who have close relations with the Abbey, and they keep all its feasts, day by day, each week-day having its particular devotion; and whether connected with the community as oblates, or by any other tie, corporal or spiritual, or as being under its protection, they take the liveliest interest in all that concerns it. Besides these, there are occasional visitors, daily changing guests, and pilgrims from afar. A monastery is in itself a place of pilgrimage, even should it not contain holy relics or some miraculous picture, for if men desire to warm themselves, they go where a large fire is burning. The full sonorous chant of the choir raises the heart irresistibly heavenwards, and a community wholly consecrated to God ever exercises a singularly attractive charm of its own over souls that are seeking Him.

Whoever, therefore, feels the need of raising himself from the dust of the toilsome world, or of seeking reconciliation with God, finds his way to the cloister. It may be some sudden ray of grace that enlightens him, or it may be the choice of a vocation or some other important decision that brings him hither. God will speak to him through His consecrated servants, and will give counsel by their lips, poor and miserable though they be, for He entrusts to their hands, though so unworthy, that wedding garment, without which the invited guest dare not take his place at the table of the King.

The confessional in the monastery is a place of special grace, and as such is highly valued and greatly sought after by pious souls. Many, too,

frequent it who have long resisted the warning call; there many a hardened heart is touched, and many a sacrilegious confession repented of and repaired. Oh! if we could but see, as with the eyes of his good angel, how that poor sinner who but now, defiled as a leper, slowly and hesitatingly entered the tribunal of penance, has come forth cleansed in the Blood of the Lamb, and radiant in the white robe of innocence! His eyes are beaming, his lips move in prayer, he feels within himself a wondrous newness of life, he has been born again a child of God! These are miracles of grace, such as are daily wrought in silence, and are but little known to the outer world. Thus the monastery church is the scene of the most wonderful events; no battlefield, no House of Parliament, can tell of such exploits, can recount such victories as are here achieved in all hiddenness by the most precious Blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thoughts such as these will certainly arise in the hearts of our guests, if from some quiet spot where they can both see and hear, they watch for a while all that goes on around them in this tranquil yet busy Church. The heart of a Catholic must indeed leap for joy when he sees what blessed work is being done here, and in what rich abundance are dispensed the treasures of Holy Church, from the altar where the faithful Christian receives his daily food, to the laver of the new-born child. At one of the altars, rosaries, crucifixes, and medals of our Holy Father St Benedict are being blessed, and the faithful carry them away as trusty weapons for the battle of life. Yonder

some one is being invested with the scapular of our Lady of Mount Carmel, and thus dedicated as a servant and client of the Queen of Heaven.

At St Maurus' altar a sick woman is just receiving that efficacious and health-giving blessing, with a relic of the true Cross, by which St Maurus has worked such great miracles. Some confraternities and pious unions are holding their meetings in the Church, and through its portal comes a procession of pilgrims with Cross and banner, who are met and conducted into the Church by some of the Fathers, bearing the sacred relics of the abbey's patron saint. Far off in the choir, the monks are kneeling motionless in quiet contemplation. It is the morning hour, the time of all others most fitted for meditation, and which is set apart for the contemplative raising of the heart to God. The priest finds in meditation the light, the strength, and the courage so needful for his sacred duties ; to the monk it is the very breath of life, for without this secret intercourse with God he could not remain faithful to his vocation. It is, as St Jerome says, "the food of the soul," and as necessary as the air itself. Would not the monk's life be a burden, yea, a very foolishness, if he did not find its model in his meditation on the life of Jesus Christ ; his strength by pondering His sayings, and his reward by his interior intercourse with Him ? These solitary hours before and after Mass and Holy Communion are the very happiest of all for the Religious, and make rich amends to him for all he has given up ; they are that "hundred fold" that was promised to him, for they make him the friend of God, who

converses with him as He did of old with Moses, face to face, as a friend talks with his friend.

But the time is passing. The bell sounds again, and there is a movement in the choir, the monks are hastening to assemble for the *statio*. Yet a few minutes, and they re-enter gravely and silently. It is the hour of Prime, of the true morning prayer. The time before Prime is devoted to prayer and spiritual exercises, which belong to the supernatural portion of the monastic labours. But we live in a world which has its own just claims upon us; the law of labour, the necessary business of the day, demands due attention. For this also we stand in need of the divine assistance, and the main purpose of Prime is to implore it.

The hour of Prime consists of two parts, of which the first, the real "morning prayer," is said in the church. The *Pater*, *Ave*, and *Credo* are said in silence; then after the usual introduction follows the glorious hymn, *Jam lucis orto sidere*, in which we earnestly beseech God to preserve us in all our ways from the snares of the enemy, shielding us from temptations from within and from without; to bridle our tongues, so that no hurtful or uncharitable word may escape us; to guard our eyes, those windows of the soul, covering them with the veil of His charity, so that vanity and scandal may find no entrance; that our hearts may be pure, filled with the love and peace of God, and far removed from all discord; that we may observe due moderation in food and drink, and may shun all sensuality and pride; so that, at the end of the day, we may, with unsullied conscience,

again bless and praise the Most Holy Trinity. Do we not here find all we need? Could the longest morning prayer say more?

The choir next recite three psalms which St Benedict himself selected for each day of the week. The little chapter which follows (1 Tim. i, 17) offers to God, the Eternal King, all the glory of the new day, then the Cantor raises the morning cry: "*Exurge Christe, adjuva nos!*" The concluding prayer re-echoes all the sentiments with which our souls are filled, commending all our thoughts, words, and actions to the gracious protection of our God. Here ends the first part of Prime, the ecclesiastical prayer. All then rise, and go in solemn procession from the choir to the chapter-house, for what is to follow belongs to the inner life of the cloister.

The chapter-house is a place of prominent importance in the abbey. It is the scene of the principal community acts of the monastic family, it is the council chamber, in which the deliberative assemblies are held, and the most weighty decisions pronounced. Here, at the conclusion of Prime, was, and still is, read a chapter from the Holy Rule, which gave its name not only to the building, but to the assembly held in it, and by association, to the governing bodies of colleges and cathedrals. The chapter house is near the church, and is entered from the cloister through massive oaken doors supported by columns. Opposite the door, high above the Abbot's throne, is seen the Abbot of Abbots, our Lord enthroned upon His Cross. This crucifix forms the solitary mural decoration of this large hall, in the midst of which stands a massive

column supporting the vaulted roof. Along the walls, beneath the richly-coloured windows which are adorned with coats-of-arms, runs a line of oak stalls, in which, as soon as the Abbot has seated himself on his raised chair, the monks take their places. Near the great column in the centre of the hall is the desk at which the acolyte stands to sing the Martyrology.

What is the Martyrology? It is the announcement of the morrow's feast. The happy children of the Church have a festival every day, the very week-days are counted by feasts (Feria ii, iii, etc.). But the festivals which belong to each recurring day are countless as the stars of heaven. Next in dignity to the festivals of our Blessed Lord and of His Holy Mother rank the anniversaries of the saints, and chiefest amongst these anniversaries stands the day of their death, which they and we count as their birthday for heaven. In early times were observed the feasts of martyrs only, of that glorious band who bore witness by their blood for Christ, and thus followed the standard of the King of Martyrs, and from them alone the *Martyrology*, the "Almanach de Gotha" of the Heavenly Court, derived its title; though later on were added the names of Virgins and Confessors. But they soon became so numerous that Usuard, who was commissioned by the Emperor Charlemagne to compile a work of this kind, found over three hundred names allotted to some of the days. Since then, all cannot be specially commemorated, and there are multitudes whose names we do not even know, it is always the custom to conclude the reading with the

words, "and of many other holy Martyrs and Confessors and holy Virgins."

"*Pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum Ejus.*" At these words the monks rise, and conclude the Martyrology by invoking our Blessed Lady and the saints, that by their intercession we may find help and salvation. Then follow prayers which were formerly said before the daily work was portioned out, for the Abbot used to send the brethren forth from Chapter to the labour of the day, and even now it is from the hour of Prime that the various occupations are begun.

We beseech Almighty God graciously to look down upon our labour, and to accept it as an offering to Him; we beg of Him to bless the work of our hands, and to direct our hearts and minds, our words and deeds, according to the way of His commandments; and as a pledge of this grace which we desire from God, the Abbot gives to all his blessing. But we cannot begin the day's work without remembering those who once shared it with us, and who have been already called away by the Lord of the vineyard; the names of those whose anniversary it is are therefore read, and the *De profundis* is said for them, and for all our departed brethren, relations, and benefactors.

Meanwhile the lay-brothers have entered, bearded, stalwart figures, amongst whom are some venerable old men, and place themselves in rows before the Abbot. The Lector then reads, or rather sings, the chapter of the Holy Rule which is appointed for that day. As often as we listen to the words of our

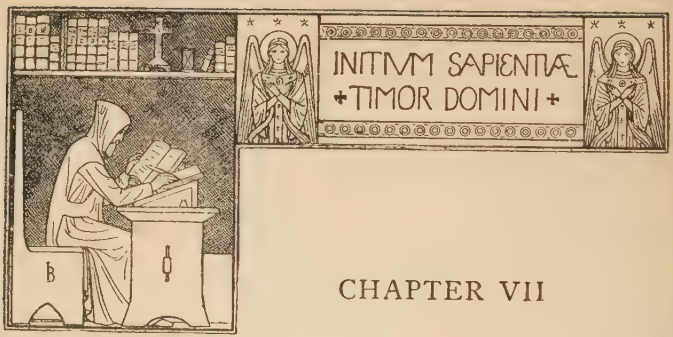
holy legislator, so often do they come to us like new revelations, and call forth within us fresh feelings and new resolves. The wisdom of the Abbot, and his solicitude for his flock, will not suffer the string which has been touched in our hearts to sound in vain; he knows how to draw from it a perfect chord. From his lofty seat he speaks words of warning and of pious exhortation to the brethren, who listen to these words of their Father with an attentive, devout, and thankful heart. He speaks of Holy Obedience, of that bond which so closely unites the monastic family, and his kind eyes beam upon his children, as he enlarges upon this, the first and all-embracing virtue of a religious, the groundwork of all perfection, this richest treasure of a monk.

Now comes the so-called "Chapter of Faults," a practice customary in Monasteries, and designed for the due maintenance of discipline and monastic observance in all their integrity. It is truly a singular tribunal in which the guilty is at once his own accused and witness, a kind of public self-denunciation, which extends to all the little delinquencies of monastic life which are exterior and apparent, but not to those interior faults which belong to the Tribunal of Penance. The monk who is called out goes into the middle of the chapter-room, and humbly acknowledges before the Abbot and the brethren all the failings and shortcomings in the observance of the Rule, or in charity, which he can call to mind, and of which he has been guilty, whether in choir, refectory, or cell, in work or in prayer. He then kneels down, receives some paternal admonition from the

Abbot, together with some slight penance, and returns to his place. His self-accusation, together with the sentence it calls forth, gives both edification and instruction to all the brethren, each of whom smites his breast in secret, and applies the reproof of the Abbot to himself. So precious in God's sight is this little family tribunal that once the monk Hildebrand, afterwards Pope St Gregory VII, saw Christ our Lord Himself, seated by the holy Abbot, Hugh of Cluny, and beheld how, at each sentence of that wise and gentle Father, He bowed His Head in approval.

At the conclusion of Chapter, those religious accuse themselves who may have broken or damaged any of the tools or other goods belonging to the monastery; for the property of the cloister is the property of God, and as the Holy Rule enjoins, is to be held sacred, "even as the vessels of the altar."

We shall meet these delinquents again in the refectory; now all are dismissed, for work is about to begin.



CHAPTER VII

LABOUR

It has already been mentioned that in former times the Abbot was wont, at the conclusion of Prime, to appoint for each of the brethren his work for the day. If this is no longer done at the same time, and in the same manner, still, to this very day the occupations of each individual monk are appointed for him by the Abbot. He arranges them according to the capabilities of each, and his decisions are guided by his charity and his desire for the sanctification of souls. He is therefore influenced, not so much by the interest or the honour of the monastery, or the personal talent of his monks, as by what may tend to their salvation; and therefore they also look upon the work appointed them as the one destined for them by the will of God. They accordingly undertake it, not with reluctance or deliberation, but with joy and zeal, for they know that God will give them the power and strength they need to carry on a work undertaken in obedience.

This is why our holy legislator insists so strongly

that if a monk be even charged to do what is "impossible," and his Superior, in spite of his modest and humble representations, still persists in giving him the command, he must obey, "trusting in the assistance of God." Cassian relates an instance of the heroic simplicity of the ancient Fathers. The monk John was given by his Abbot, who wished to try his obedience, an old stump of a tree, and was told to plant it in the ground, and to water it twice every day, that it might bring forth leaves and buds. The youth did so without one expression of demur, and continued this labour for a whole year, until the Abbot, touched by his humility and obedience, bade him leave it off. The holy Abbot Pachomius came one day to one of his monasteries, and finding the monks busily engaged in plaiting rush mats, sat down with them, and began to share their labour. Then a lad said to him, "Father, you are not doing it right; we do it this way." So St Pachomius begged the boy to show him how to do it better, and began, in humble simplicity, to learn from him.

The Benedictine Order, unlike others, does not devote itself exclusively to one particular task or work; it has ever placed itself entirely at the disposal of God and of His Church, and its sons are the knights of Holy Church. It demands no special sphere of labour, nor does it decline any; it gives to none the preference, neither is it ashamed of any. The secret of its fruitfulness and of its strength lies in the sanctification of its members, which is the sole object of the Order. A monk who, according to the spirit of St Benedict, is a man of prayer and of

obedience, is capable of any work to which God may call him by the will of Superiors and of Holy Church. We know that the sons of St Benedict brought Christianity to the greater part of Europe; that they founded cities, and promoted agriculture; that they became the councillors of kings, and bishops of the Church; that they instructed the young, and tended the sick that they had amongst them, men skilled in science and in all the arts. But if their industry was rich in blessing outside the cloister, still their whole power had its roots within. "Their monasteries," says Montalembert, "were for ten centuries and more the schools, the libraries, the guest-houses, the work-shops, the penitentiaries, and the hospitals of Christendom." At every period of its history, the Order gave what the age required, but always and only from beneath the fostering protection of the quiet monastic life. Bound and shielded by his vow of stability, the monk left only in obedience, and for a short time, the hallowed precincts of his cloister, and sought as soon as possible to return to it again. His home was the abbey, his strength lay in his life detached and shut off from the world, his confidence reposed solely on the prayers of his brethren. If, then, we desire to study the Benedictine's life of labour in its root and principle, we must do so, not by observing the chance employments of the individual monk outside the cloister, but rather the work that goes on within.

Perhaps our guests may reply, "We do not wish to hear what the Order did in former times, for that we already know, but we should like to see and hear

what it does now." I might answer that as we follow the same Rule as our predecessors, so do we work according to the same principles, and if God called us and helped us, we could accomplish all that they did. But our labour must ever be undertaken in obedience, commenced in faith and simplicity of heart, carried on with diligence, cheerfulness, and perseverance, penetrated with the spirit of penance, and accompanied throughout by fervent prayer, "that God may be glorified in all things," according to the motto of our Order, "*Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus.*" For we belong, body and soul, to God; we have sins both of body and soul to do penance for; we have dedicated our senses as well as our intellect to the service of God, and, therefore, our labour should be twofold, both corporal and spiritual. And thus it was regulated by our holy Father St Benedict. In his days manual labour predominated, for the monks were mostly laymen, and were often obliged to earn their daily bread by the work of their hands; and St Benedict tells them that they are not to be distressed at having so much field labour, for that they are then truly monks when they thus live by the labour of their hands, as did their forefathers and the Holy Apostles. Since that time, however, Holy Church has decreed that all the choir monks should receive sacred orders, and, therefore, mental labour, study, and the care of souls has become the principal occupation of the priests. The work of the house, at least the heavier portion of it, is on this account now entrusted to the lay-brothers, of whose status in the community we shall presently speak. But it ever

remains a venerated custom and principle in the Order, that manual labour appertains to the integrity and perfection of monastic life, because it expresses the subjection and penance of the body, it humbles the spirit, and teaches us to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. If the community be small, or if poverty, sickness amongst the lay-brothers, or other special circumstances, render it necessary, the Fathers are not ashamed to work in the house or in the garden, to hew and carry the wood, or to clean the vegetables for the kitchen ; and this was the case not long ago amongst ourselves, when the greater number of the lay-brothers had the influenza. The novices especially are to be employed in manual labour ; they sweep the house, and help the lay-brothers with the haymaking and potato digging. In Lent especially every one voluntarily undertakes more menial work. To sweep his own cell, brush his clothes and clean his boots, is, of course, a monk's own business, for he did not come to be served, but himself to serve others. How many examples may be found amongst the legends of the saints which testify to their love for manual labour ! St Margaret, daughter of King Bela of Hungary, a Dominican nun, took upon herself the very lowest offices : she swept the convent, washed the dishes, and cleaned out the dirtiest places. Bishop Julian of Cuenza, in Spain, plaited baskets of reeds to get alms for the redemption of captives. St Kentigern, Bishop of Glasgow, worked in the fields to earn his own food. Pope Clement VIII. washed the feet of strangers ; and the learned Baronius, when the papal envoys

brought him the Cardinal's hat, was found washing up the dishes in the kitchen. If, then, household work is nowadays more that of the lay-brethren, exterior work, such as the circumstances of our present time demand, has still continued to be the exception, and even the duties of those having the care of souls are limited to fixed days and hours.

But the true field of Benedictine labour is the cell, and so, before we go the round of the abbey, and observe the different monks at their work, we would fain say a few words as to what the cell of a religious is, and what it means.

The name of cell comes from *celare*, to hide, and signifies a secret chamber, a quiet retreat. In the Roman temples the most secret inner part where the image of the divinity stood was called the *cella*. In like manner is the cell of the monk a sanctuary, in which, as in his heart, God may dwell. It is, as Peter the Venerable says, his grave, out of which he will one day rise again; it is his paradise, wherein he finds his earthly happiness; and therefore, however small it may be, it is his best-loved spot on earth. Love for his cell indicates a true son of St Benedict. It keeps him safe from the dangers of the world, frees him from all earthly attachments, and enables him to live in God. If he leave it, his heart should remain behind, and he should hasten to return. It is there God makes Himself known to him, it is there the Holy Ghost works out the sanctification of his soul, and thence will it one day take its radiant flight heavenwards. "Go away and sit in your cell," said the holy Abbot Moses, "it will teach you all things";

and the monk Alcuin said with many a sigh, when he was called by Charlemagne to his court: "O my cell, sweet and beloved abode! farewell! O my dear cell, farewell for ever!" Anthony of Guevara says: "A perfect man makes a cloister of the world, and an imperfect one makes a world of the cloister." It is not the habit that makes the man of God, but the spirit by which he is animated, and we can only receive this spirit in silence and in solitude.

In early times the monks slept together in dormitories, as our Holy Father St Benedict ordained, but very soon single cells were erected as hermitages, like those of the early anchorites, and the more sacerdotal studies and intellectual labour prevailed in the cloister the greater became the significance of the cell in monastic life. Separate cells are mentioned as early as by Cassian; later on they became general through the influence of the congregations of Cluny and Bursfeld, and they were ordered for all monasteries by Pope Benedict XII. "Solitude," says St Bernard, "perfects a priest."

Naturally this "workshop for spiritual exercises," this place of refuge for the monastic priest, is strictly guarded and watched over by the customs of the cloister, since it is to it that he returns, as the dove to the Ark, because in the outer world he can find no place for the sole of his foot. No visitor may enter it without special reason, and the express permission of the Superior; even the brethren can only speak together briefly at the half-opened door. If any one must be admitted, a little slide in the door is pushed back, and the room thus becomes at once an open one.

This slide is meant to represent to the inmate of the cell the ever-present Eye of God. But we will avail ourselves of our leave to enter freely, and will examine this little sanctuary thus shut off from the world. The small vaulted room is lighted by a large window, through whose diamond-shaped panes the morning sun streams in. The cell should, by its simplicity, poverty, and cleanliness, be a bright reflection of the pure soul of its inmate, and thus rejoice the heavenly Bridegroom when He comes to visit him.

A simple bed befitting a monk, a writing-desk, a washing-stand, a cupboard, a table covered with the necessary books, one or two chairs, and a small prie-dieu, form its furniture ; a crucifix, and pictures of the Holy Mother of God, our Holy Father St Benedict, and the inmate's patron saints, are its ornaments. At the entrance hangs a holy water stoup, which is replenished every Sunday morning by freshly blessed water. This is carried all over the house by two acolytes, and with the words "*Ecce aqua benedicta*" they refill each stoup, the inmate replying, "*Sit mihi salus et vita.*"

Since not only the name of the holy patron under whose protection the cell and its owner are placed is inscribed over each door, but also that of the inmate, we may proceed rapidly on our round, and without more ado find those we wish to see. We will begin, then, as is fitting, with the Very Rev. Father Prior, for we had better defer our visit to the Lord Abbot till a more suitable hour. At our knock, we hear within, the call of "*Ave.*" The Prior, a stately man in the prime of life, looks up pleasantly

from his writing-table, without, however, interrupting his work; he is well-used to knocks at his door, for they come all day long. He is the prime minister and vicegerent of the Abbot, the chancellor of the monastic kingdom, the faithful guardian of discipline and order, and hence work is never wanting to him. All the countless business questions, small and great, requests, complaints, and inquiries are poured into his ever ready ear. He looks after the guests and the poor, he assists the Abbot with the burden of his large correspondence, and is at his side whenever needed. Then he is the first in choir, superintends the younger monks and their studies, and watches over the wants and labours of the lay-brothers. We find traces of him everywhere about the house, but in spite of his great authority, he is ever the most humble and obedient of sons to his Abbot; in spite of all his cares and worries, his eyes are ever beaming with gentle kindliness towards all who approach him. The Abbot has set his house in order like a wise man, and knows with whom he can share the cares of his government.

The good Father Prior would certainly receive us with cordial affability, but we will not disturb him longer at his writing, and will go on to the next door, on which we find the name of the "Cellarer.'

It is the Cellarer who administers the temporal affairs of the monastery. To him our Holy Father has devoted a most beautiful and instructive chapter of his Rule, for he fills one of the most important offices of the monastery. All temporal cares are laid on his shoulders, so that the other

brethren may live free as the birds of the air, or the lilies of the field, from all solicitude. Their heavenly Father provides for them, but He does so through His representative, the Abbot, and he, like the Apostles, has appointed some to help him in the service of the house and of the table, that thus he may be free to break to them their spiritual bread.

Thus the Cellarer is the nursing-father of the convent, and with paternal care is mindful of their every need. Temperate and frugal though he be, he never forgets that the brethren, in order to keep up the Choir Office day and night, and fulfil their allotted work, stand in need of much bodily support. He seeks with large-hearted solicitude to provide all that may be needful for those who are weakly, especially the younger ones, and the old and infirm. And if he has nothing else to give, he speaks a kind word in his quiet, cheerful way, "so that, as the Holy Rule says, none may be grieved or saddened in the House of God." If we enter his cell after that lay-brother who has just gone in with invoices and bills, we shall find him buried in account books and business papers. The Father Cellarer has indeed need of assistants that he may not be quite weighed down by the burden of his charge; the kitchen, the garden, the housekeeping, are entrusted to younger fathers, but it is he who has all the responsibility, so far as the Abbot has made it over to him. His head may well throb and ache under his grey hair, so we will go away quietly, with a heartfelt petition that St Joseph, the heavenly

Cellarer of all monasteries, may bear him in mind, and be ever well-disposed to help him.

His next door neighbour is not at home. He is the Rector of the school, the stately buildings of which stand close to the Abbey, but divided from it by a court. About a hundred boys are brought up there and instructed in all the different branches of study. It is, indeed, a heavy care for the Abbot, and a self-sacrificing labour for the twelve or fifteen fathers who devote themselves, and all their strength, and what time is left free from their choir duties, to the education of these lads. In these days, when public schools are so infected with the poison of unbelief and immorality, such an institute under safe spiritual direction, in which not only mind and body, but the soul also, are well cared for, is an immense consolation for parents. The importance and utility of such an establishment (which, though it is by no means an essential part of the industry of the cloister, is yet very congenial to its spirit) is clearly demonstrated by the way in which former pupils keep up a grateful remembrance of, and connection with, the Abbey, and also by the bond which continues to exist between the old schoolfellows, even of the most varied stations in life. These monastic schools recall some of the oldest traditions of the Order; they spring up wherever an abbey can find its full development; they have been, ever since the early part of the Middle Ages, favoured nurseries of learning, and many saintly religious have been trained up in them.

We will now go a little further, and enter the cell

of one of the more learned of the fathers. He is standing at a desk, deep in some ponderous folio bound in antique leather. His table, bed, and chair are loaded with open books or papers covered with notes and extracts; he is most busily engaged, and only now and then, as the clock in the old tower strikes, does he raise his eyes to the crucifix, or murmur some short aspiration to sanctify the coming hour. His industry reminds us of the Venerable Bede, that learned monk of the eighth century, the glory of our Saxon Church, who spent fifty-six years of his life in the cloister, and was never idle, but, as the lessons for his feast relate, "was always writing or reading, learning, teaching or praying," and in spite of the most brilliant inducements and the invitation of the Pope himself, could never be persuaded to leave that house of peace.

Like this, his model, our father is always occupied, making the most of every moment. At the first sound of the bell calling him to the choir, he interrupts his work and lays down his pen. Scarcely has he left the church and returned to his cell, than he is again poring over his book, and going on with his work as if it had never been interrupted. He is an authority on liturgical subjects, and in close correspondence with some of the most learned men of Europe, whilst he is himself one of the most simple and humble of monks, and thus does his learning become for him, not as with so many worldly-wise, a snare set by ambition, but a ladder ascending heavenwards; for he owes his wisdom to prayer, receives it with humility, and refers it wholly to God's glory.

In the next cell we find a younger monk, but one who is already a ripe scholar, and whose name is not unknown in the sphere of historical research. He has succeeded in discovering some important documents in one of the great libraries to which he has been sent by his Abbot, and now he is occupied in deciphering and interpreting the newly found treasure, so that it may be published. He is a first-rate critic, and his pen, which makes its mark in several scientific periodicals, is somewhat feared. He is not feared in the cloister, however, for he is always cheerful and ever ready to be of service to his brethren.

It would be too fatiguing for our guests if we showed them all the cells which are in a long row down the wide, bright corridor. Adjoining one another in this passage, they form, as it were, one large apartment divided into cells, and this is called the Dorter, that is, the sleeping-place. The most profound silence reigns there, to preserve in it monastic quiet and peace. In such solitude a man can do good work, and true knowledge can flourish, such as will bring forth no mere hot-house produce, but sound, slowly-ripened, and mature fruit.

As we pass a cell door we hear talking. What may be going on there? Let us look in. Three fathers are sitting together in earnest conversation. It is a council of war, and they are planning the order of the campaign. They are missioners who, in a few days, are going out again to give a ten days' mission to a large congregation at some distance. They have divided the preaching between them, and are now discussing together the order of

the day and its distribution. It is a trying campaign on which they are going, and therefore they do not leave the cloister without entreating the prayers of the brethren. Before their departure they kneel in the middle of the choir, and the Abbot gives them a parting blessing. During their absence the assistance of the Holy Spirit is daily implored for them and their labours, and they rely on His help.

The consciousness of support by this fraternal intercession is a consolation and source of strength to these messengers of peace. How would it otherwise be possible that their sermons, which are but simple words with little of eloquence in them should so touch the hearts of the people, and have such a powerful efficacy as to completely change a whole congregation? Yet they are told in thankful letters by many a parish priest that such results follow their preaching. Enemies are reconciled ill-gotten goods are restored, grievances set straight, and men and women (the public officials at their head) approach the table of the Lord, and begin a new and more religious life. The blessing on a mission is as undeniable as it is marvellous; it is not the work of man but of God, and therefore it is only natural and fitting that the community should receive the returning brethren with joy, and in common should praise God, Who has shown Himself so great in those that were weak and lowly.

We find a few cells empty. The Librarian is on his parade-ground, where he finds enough to do for the greater part of the day, drilling and marshalling

his troops. The Sacrist, too, is busy, laying out the vestments and getting ready for High Mass. The Master of the Works we met just now; he was showing some of the lay-brothers which part of the cloister was to be freshly tiled. The Hosteller has just been called to the door to receive some priests who wish to make their annual retreat here. To give them advice and to help them with books is the business of the Father Subprior, a venerable grey-haired priest, who at this moment is in one of the parlours near the door, with some ladies, whom he is directing in making their spiritual exercises.

The father who has the superintendence of the kitchen department is to be seen standing in that window, his face as long as if he were concocting a bill to be brought before Parliament; he is giving some directions to the head cook. They are discussing the bill of fare for the next day, and considering what they can have as a second dish with the young vegetables that have just been brought in from the garden. It is a serious matter, for as the Italian proverb has it, "Where cooking is good, the discipline is good."

But that the gastronomic solicitude of the good father kitchener may not draw him too much after the fleshpots of Egypt, Father Abbot has just laid upon him the counterpoise of preparing a sermon for the following Sunday.

Once a year, on an appointed day, all these officials resign their charge into the hands of the Abbot. From him comes all power and authority; he takes all back in order to give it out afresh, as may seem

best to him, and each one in turn acknowledges humbly in Chapter any carelessness or negligence of which he may have been guilty.

In yonder wing of the Abbey building is the school of the clerics, the young philosophers and theologians. Profound stillness prevails here; only from one of the large class-rooms do we hear the voice of the lecturer. Opposite are the large well-lighted studios of the art school. All arts and artistic professions find their place in the cloister, and art here manifests itself in spirit and form compatible with the monastic character. Perhaps it may interest some of our visitors to see the studios; we will take them there this afternoon; at present there would be hardly time enough, as the bells will soon chime for High Mass. As we go by, we will just look into another cell and observe a young monk engaged in a very strange occupation. He is in the act of writing one of those large books of music called antiphoners, and he is illuminating it with rich miniatures. We have all of us seen similarly neat and carefully executed work in libraries and museums, and believed it to be an art peculiar to the Middle Ages, that had long since died out, and for which no one in these days of steam and electricity had time or patience. That may be true, and, indeed, this restless hurry, this desire to save time and to have everything done quickly, has penetrated even into the cloister. It is thus all the more satisfactory to see with what love and care, quite after the spirit of old days, our artist is adorning his antiphons with pious pictures and illuminations in gold and colours.

In the next cell sits the Annalist of the cloister, writing the chronicles. There must be some important event to record, some profession, or visit of some great personage, for his pen glides swiftly over the paper. This, the writing of chronicles, is an old and praiseworthy monastic custom, and we all know what highly-prized treasures the annals of the great abbeys of the Middle Ages have become, as furnishing materials for history. They have preserved the spirit of the fathers, together with the memorial of their lives, and thus they stir up their successors to follow their example. Shall I take our guests any further? It might weary them, and we find the same thing wherever we go; every one is at work, as if he had to complete an important task to-day, and had only this one day at his disposal. We will visit the workshop of the lay-brothers later. But one old father I must point out to you, whose door we are just passing; he is working at a lexicon of Oriental languages; they say that for the last twenty years he has known no other way but that from his cell to the choir, and from the choir to his cell. May he thus find one day the way to Heaven!

This staircase leads up to the Novitiate; it is placed on the upper storey to keep the Novices always in mind that they must descend by humility, that they may ascend by prayer.

But the bells have begun to chime for High Mass, and at the first stroke every occupation is broken off; the obedient monk, as if the bell had struck him, lays aside his pen, not even stopping to complete the letter he was forming. He leaves his work, however

congenial it may be to him, or whatever its importance, convinced that the good thoughts he has interrupted will be doubly made up for, just as, once upon a time, St Andrew of Burgundy tore himself from the caresses of the Infant Jesus when the bell called him to prayer, and, on returning to his cell, found the Divine Child still there, and more wondrously loving than before.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HIGH MASS AND THE MONASTERY CHURCH

THE bells which are calling us to the church for High Mass have changed the whole aspect of the cloister. Every occupation in which its inmates were engaged is broken off.

The instruction of the clerics and the spiritual conference of the novices have ceased, the scholar has closed his learned tome, the copyist has put down his pen, the artist has laid aside his brush; this summons to High Mass is for all, and even to the visitors we can suggest nothing more important than that they should assist at High Mass. Perhaps, however, the inquiry may rise to their lips, why such stress should be laid on the attendance at High Mass, when so many Masses have been already offered up since the earliest hours of the morning; and certainly there is no one in the house who has not either heard Mass, or said it himself already.

We have said, in speaking of the choir-office, that the Holy Mass is the most sublime act in the worship of Almighty God, that it is the sun of the sacerdotal life of prayer, and that the Divine Office derives all its light and heat from the Holy Sacrifice. Under this aspect, then, private Masses are not by any means sufficient in a monastic choir. Just as a monk would not duly satisfy the obligations of his state if, without urgent cause, he were to say his Office in private; in like manner, an abbey in which there was no solemn, conventual Mass would be neglectful of the main object of its existence as a centre of Divine Worship. We have no desire by this assertion to depreciate in any way the custom of saying Low Mass, for well do we know that the Holy Sacrifice offered in the poorest Mission chapel has no less value than the grandest Pontifical Mass sung in a cathedral. But Holy Church has always considered the Mass, solemnly sung, and assisted at by clergy and people, to be the most fitting worship of God, and the quiet Low Mass as only a substitute when circumstances and necessity require. Since, as we have already stated, the official and solemn worship of God is the chief obligation and vocation of the Benedictine Order, so must the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice be conspicuous by the employment of everything that can add to its solemnity. Therefore the Order has always constructed the most glorious churches, adorning them with all possible lavishness; on this account it has drawn all the arts into its service, or rather it has taught its sons every art and every trade, so that in the Middle Ages its abbeys were high-schools of architecture, sculpture

and painting. Hence we owe to it the cultivation of the ecclesiastical chant, the preservation and development of the Sacred Liturgy; and it was for this same purpose that it possessed treasures of gold, silver, and precious stones in artistically-wrought chalices and sacred vessels, together with splendid vestments and every kind of costly ornament. The great principle was maintained in the Order that nothing was too costly for the service of Almighty God. As an example of this, the very walls of the Abbey Church were inlaid with precious mosaics, the high altar was covered with gold and the other altars with silver. Abbot Desiderius of Monte Cassino sent for Greek artists from Constantinople to adorn his church with their beautiful decorations, and to form a school of art in the cloister, where mosaic work, sculpture, and the art of painting glass might be learnt. It is related of the famous Abbot Suger of St Denis, that, though poor in all that concerned himself, and living in a simple cell like the rest of the monks, he had the worship of God performed in his church with the most lavish expenditure and pomp; and it is unnecessary to remind English readers of the zeal of an Abbot Sampson, or of an Alan of Walsingham.

This solemn service of God requires richly adorned churches, and fitting surroundings and adjuncts; consequently, the large incomes of many abbeys were spent for the most part in enriching the church, and on the divine service. Of these, at their suppression, they were robbed; and under the pretext of withdrawing superfluities from the "lazy monks," and liquidating their whole capital, the sanctuary was

despoiled, and Almighty God defrauded of the honour due to Him. How many cartloads of precious vessels, and vestments of cloth of gold, were thus carried away from the desecrated churches, and how many objects consecrated to the service of God were sold by auction, broken up and squandered!

But the life of the Church is not to be crushed out thus, for it is deeply rooted in the religious feelings of the faithful. As soon as the monasteries could spring up once more, the first care of their restorers, following the traditions of their forefathers, was for the due celebration of the divine service. Instead of broad lands such as their predecessors had possessed, their yet more productive territory lay in the pious hearts of those who were touched by the destitution of their heavenly King. They knew that He was reposing in the lowly crib of the Tabernacle, and they brought to Him their precious vessels, ciborium and monstrance, symbolising thereby their own hearts, which they desired to offer Him as His dwelling. Such as these know no holier house than that of the Lord, and they allow their own house to be wanting in many an ornament, and even comfort, that the house of God may be adorned with altars, statues, and paintings. They feel the incapacity of their own voices to praise God fittingly, and so they endeavour, through bells and organs, to offer to him a more melodious song of praise. And if they have nothing costly to give, they bring to the altar sweet-smelling flowers, which like the incense, are symbols of prayer.

Whilst in the parish churches of small towns and villages the Holy Sacrifice can only be offered up in a quiet and simple way, it ever remains the privilege of abbeys that in their churches throughout the whole cycle of the ecclesiastical year, the recurring commemorations of the great mysteries of the Faith should be kept by a series of solemn festivals. It is, as it were, one long triumphal procession in honour of our Redeemer.

In the Middle Ages, Emperors and Kings caused High Mass to be celebrated in their presence every day, and the like took place in the cathedrals, and for this end canons and singers were appointed that at least in the Mother Church of the diocese the daily High Mass should not be wanting.

But, above all, the monasteries, with their numerous priests and clerics, were able to carry out this intention in a becoming manner, and hence this royal and high-priestly function has become a special prerogative of the monastic orders, and one which they could never abandon without being unfaithful to their office and their high position in Holy Church. This attendance in common at Mass is one of the most important spiritual exercises of monastic life, and is of special utility as regards the spirit of prayer. Our Holy Father the Pope allows no day to pass on which he does not hear a second Mass, after having said his own, thus placing himself as one of the faithful (or rather as the representative of all the faithful) at the foot of the Cross, in order to be present at the Adorable Sacrifice. And in like manner does a religious community kneel daily

before the altar in reverent devotion, and lay there the homage and the supplications of all Christendom.

Looking at the Conventual Mass in this light, it is easy to understand that all the religious should wish to assist at it, as in fact they do, and that only in isolated cases, and for weighty reasons, would Superiors dispense them from attendance at High Mass.

We see the monks, standing in their stalls, as at the Night Office, in their full black cowls, whilst the celebrant, accompanied by deacon and sub-deacon, and preceded by acolytes and thurifer, passes through their midst to the altar. After a brief prayer he takes his place below the steps on the Epistle side. The Abbot gives the sign, and Tierce is begun. Since as far back as the sixth century it has been the custom in the West to join Tierce (one of the most ancient of the Day Hours of the Church) with the Holy Sacrifice, at least on festivals, and we may note that Tierce (the third hour of the day reckoned from sunrise, *i.e.*, about nine o'clock) was even under the old covenant one of the appointed hours of prayer, at which psalms were sung. This Hour, and Sext, which immediately follows Mass, surround it as with a garland of psalms, and unite it closely with the Office of the day.

On solemn festivals, when the Abbot sings Pontifical Mass, he is vested at the throne during Tierce, which is sung with great solemnity.

To-day the ceremonies are simple, for it is not a great feast. The throne is empty, no assistants throng its steps. There are no Cantors in ample copes before the bronze eagle in the choir, no crowd of torch-bearers and attendant brothers.

The priest has concluded Tierce, and changes the cope for the chasuble, the consecrated vestment for Mass, which symbolises charity and the yoke of the Lord, which charity renders sweet. For this reason it is made of the most costly materials and richly ornamented, for therein the priest, like the Church, the King's Bride, in vesture of gold wrought about in divers colours, is to meet the heavenly Bridegroom.

If it is but seemly to select for the sacred vestments the richest and best materials, it is yet more important that they should be tastefully made, both as to shape and design. In this respect, much has been wanting during the last few centuries, and even up to the present day. The large chasuble of former days, with its rich and graceful folds, which draped the priest in a fitting manner, has gradually dwindled into a small, stiff coat of mail, ornamented in the most tasteless fashion with large gaudy flowers. Happily, of late, the style and spirit of former days has begun to show itself again in the sacred vestments. The monastic orders, as mainly concerned with the due celebration of ecclesiastical worship, should be foremost in good example in this respect. It is the most beautiful occupation of the daughters of our Holy Father St Benedict, to work for the altar, and to produce vestments of good and tasteful design. They are called in a special manner to this sacred employment, and they should do their utmost to improve the public taste, which ignorance, slovenliness, and machine work have combined to ruin, and to withdraw the making of vestments from those who look upon it only from a commercial standpoint,

only once more undertaking the work themselves. Let them, with that earnest diligence which only love can prompt, offer stitch after stitch to the glory of God, as they embroider the richest materials with beautiful designs and ornaments in threads of silk and gold. Who could be more fitted for this task than those who keep their vigils around the Holy of Holies, who seek to penetrate deeply into the spirit of that Divine Office which it is their privilege to recite?

They are the descendants and followers of St Etheldreda, St Gertrude, and St Mechtild; in their churches the solemn Mass and Office are daily sung, and they find their chief pleasure and satisfaction in rendering all its surroundings as rich as possible. They, as well as other Brides of Christ in different Orders, are called by their holy vocation to work in an especial manner for Holy Church and for the altar. Beside them, and in union with them, women of culture and education should also work with all possible love and zeal for the service of the Church, and should provide linen for the altar, as was so often done even by royal ladies in the ages of faith.

But the priest is now vested. He stands between his assistants and greets both sides of the choir by an inclination. He then approaches the altar, and whilst he stands at its base, deeply humbling himself in the knowledge of his utter unworthiness, the Introit is sung, and the choir commences the *Kyrie eleison*, in which, conscious of our own misery, and trusting in the mercy of God, we cry three times to each person of the Most Holy Trinity, and thus

unite ourselves with the nine choirs of angels. What need have we of many words? God knows our misery. If the Church desires to reiterate her petition for grace and mercy, she does not seek to do so by fresh thoughts and words, but finds her most urgent expression in the continual repetition of her trustful cry.

Thus did St Francis of Assisi repeat the whole night through, "*Deus meus et omnia!*" So we in like manner may repeat, as we kneel before the Tabernacle, "*Dominus meus et Deus meus!*" And thus like St Gertrude, lost in one deep all-absorbing thought of the all-powerful and all-merciful love of God, we may often experience, as she did, during the *Kyrie*, feelings of wondrous enlightenment and consolation.

One of the most beautiful ceremonies of High Mass is the censing of the altar. The altar symbolises Christ, to whom the Eastern Magi offered incense, and insomuch as the incense is consumed by burning, it symbolises creation annihilating itself before the infinite Majesty of God. The insignificant grains of incense represent our good works, which by the fire of divine love are changed into sweet-smelling perfume. May our prayers, like those clouds of incense, ascend as a sweet-smelling savour to God, and His mercy come down upon us! Later on in the Mass, the gifts which we offer, the sacred ministers, the choir, the faithful, everything connected with the Holy Sacrifice are censed, and thereby consecrated to God.

"*Gloria in excelsis Deo*," "*Et in terra pax*," responds

the choir. Intoned by angels nineteen hundred years ago, this hymn resounds to the praise of God, on and on throughout His Holy Church, and continues in unending Christmas joy to glorify the Most Holy Trinity.

The monks in choir have no eyes for the people who fill the body of the Church, they belong wholly to the altar, to which they turn their entire attention. This reverent demeanour has always been a stringent precept of monastic observance. It is related of Duke Boniface of Tuscany, that once, in the Abbey of Pomposa, he observed the boys during divine service, how devoutly and sweetly they sang, with downcast eyes, and in order to try them, he sent some one secretly up to the roof to scatter a handful of gold pieces through a chink amongst them, so that, falling with a ringing sound, they rolled about the floor of the choir ; but not one of the boys looked round, or stirred to pick up the gold. And once upon a time, a grey-haired veteran, Walter of Aquitaine, desiring to conclude his stormy life by one of strict penance, and seeking for this end a well-ordered monastery, came to one wherein the monks were singing Vespers. Wishing to test their recollection, he struck hard on the stone pavement with his pilgrim's staff, which was hung all round with little bells, but the monks never raised their eyes ; only one boy turned his head inquiringly towards the pilgrim, and for so doing promptly received a sound box on the ear from his master. And the pious old hero remained in that monastery, for he had found therein what he sought, holy zeal in the service of God.

The glorious *Sanctus* is sung, while a little procession of lay-brothers, bearing torches, passes up the choir to kneel on the steps of the Sanctuary — and then God the Son, the glorious Redeemer of the world, appears to His people under the lowly form of bread, and all bow down in reverent awe. It is the most solemn moment, and in the devout stillness we can almost hear each breath.

The bell in the Sanctus-turret sounds, and announces to any of the brothers who may not be present, that the miracle of the altar has once again been wrought, so that, wherever they may be, whether in the cloister, the garden, or the fields, they may fall on their knees in adoration, and unite themselves in spirit with Jesus Christ in the Holy Sacrifice. During the singing of the *Agnus Dei* the priest kisses the altar, and then gives the token of fraternal charity to the deacon, who passes it on to the sub-deacon, who in his turn gives it first to the Abbot, and then to the brethren, as a message of peace. It is no empty ceremony when they thus embrace each other and exchange greetings; the one saying, "*Pax tecum*," the other responding, "*Et cum spiritu tuo*." They feel bound yet more closely together, and it is in this perfect union of hearts that their prayers are offered; and while their angel guardians salute one another, every thought of uncharity or ill-temper melts away at this greeting of the Lamb.

High Mass being ended, Sext immediately follows. This hour recalls that of the Crucifixion, and turns our thoughts to the sacrifice offered upon the Cross. Under the deep impression of that awful moment,

our sentiments of thanksgiving find their best expression in the psalms. At the conclusion of Sext the monks leave the choir and return silently to their work.

The church is now empty, and we can examine it at our leisure. We shall not require the guidance of the brother Sacristan, so we can leave him to go about his business in peace; he is just now occupied in cleaning and replenishing the lamps before the picture of our Blessed Lady, and we note with what earnest care and exactness he performs this duty. The office of a Sacristan or Sexton is a most important and most sacred one. I remember that the desire of one day filling it with diligence and love was a dream of my youth, for I had often observed with sorrow how carelessly and with what cold indifference this service, worthy of the angels, was performed. This is of course frequently the result of want of instruction, and in the due training of Sacristans a diocesan institute might be of much service. But too often it is a lively faith that is wanting; the frequent recurrence of the most sacred duties, the daily round of work in the sanctuary itself, tends to blunt the feelings of awe and reverence; and if a deep sense of the truths of religion and the most genuine piety is wanting, by degrees tepidity creeps in, which too often leads to utter infidelity. So it comes to pass that many a poor Sacristan who has the charge of the perpetual lamp, forgets that it indicates the real presence of God, and while he spreads the white cloth for others at the Table of the Lord, neglects to prepare his own place

there, and to nourish himself with the Bread of Life.

In these respects the brother who, under the superintendence of the Father Sacrist, has the care of this Church is more edifying. He knows that he has to represent before the Blessed Sacrament the brethren who are at work in the fields or at their trades; he knows that, unworthy as he feels himself, he is charged with a most important post, and therefore he is to be found early and late in the House of God, joyfully occupied in guarding and cleaning, adorning and beautifying it, to the very best of his power. He feels that the eye of the hidden God is ever resting on him, and therefore he is constantly praying, and his glance is ever turning towards the Tabernacle.

So let us not disturb him, he has enough to do in order to comply with the various demands made upon him. Now, it is a confessor that is wanted, then medals or rosaries to be blessed; one person is asking for the blessing of St Maurus, another is anxious to receive Holy Communion, and so he is kept running about to fetch the fathers, and to do errands, that no pious soul may go away without help and consolation.

What strikes us most about the Abbey Church is its size and magnificence. This, however, is easy to account for, when we remember that for Monastic Orders such as the Benedictine, whose chief obligation is that of the Divine Office in choir, and the solemn worship of Almighty God in community, the church is the most important place, and the real necessity of their existence.

A gentleman once said to the father who was taking him round our church: "But this is a church for the whole country?" "Nay, but for our dear Lord," was the reply, and in this lies the whole secret. The church is not for man, but for God, and whether the faithful who are present be many or few, nothing s altered in the dignity or splendour of the Divine Service. The church was built for God, and for the monks, and therefore the choir (to which a flight of steps leads up) occupies a large space, often as much as half the church. This, with its richly carved choir-stalls, is separated from the nave by a massive screen, adorned with painting and sculpture, whilst from the spacious loft above it rises the mighty rood, where a lamp is ever burning before the sacred image of the Crucified.

On a massive pedestal of black marble, placed in a vaulted niche, sits the Prince of the Apostles, his left hand wielding the keys entrusted to him by our Blessed Lord, his right hand raised in blessing. The statue is a copy of the famous one in St Peter's at Rome, which is at least as old as the time of St Leo the Great. We may, according to the Roman custom (first introduced, we believe, by Cardinal Baronius), press our lips to the foot of the statue, and then lay our forehead against it, in sign of communion with and submission to the See of Peter, saying at the same time, "*Pax et obedientia.*"

The Benedictines offered loyal support to our Mother, the Holy Roman Church, and as the sons of St Francis and St Dominic are always ready in times of trial to offer for her their service and their

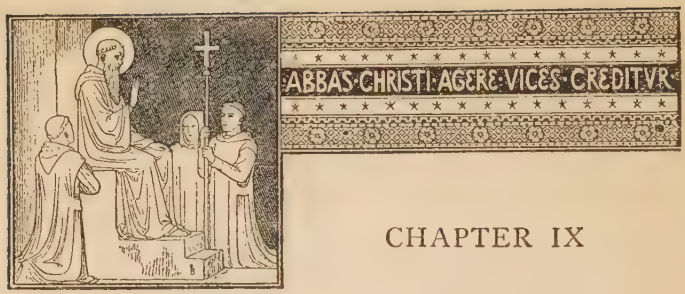
very lives, so, too, have the Monastic Orders continually trained up willing and capable combatants for the defence of the rights and liberty of the Sovereign Pontiff and the Church, his charge.

But we cannot quit the church without once more paying our homage to our Divine Lord, present in the Tabernacle. This abiding Presence it is which gives to Catholic churches their own peculiar atmosphere of devotion ; for there within the shrine, in the golden pyx, lies the Body of the Lord, as in the crib, from which He stretches forth His Hands towards us in yearning love. And when He desires to bless His faithful people, He mounts His throne in the jewelled monstrance, and permits Himself to be raised in Benediction with the sign of the Cross. In the Abbey Church of Einsiedeln there is a monstrance, which is set with about three thousand pearls, six hundred diamonds, many sapphires, rubies, and emeralds. It was the work of the most skilful hands, and took over ten years to make. To God Himself, indeed, it matters not whether He repose in this shrine sparkling with gold and precious stones, or in the humble tabernacle of carved wood of some poor Franciscan chapel, the one is as little worthy of His Infinite Majesty as the other.

Here is the place, so happy and so rich in blessings, where the brethren would fain kneel day and night, to pour out their hearts before Him, to thank Him for all they are, and all they have, and, above all, for the unspeakable privilege of dwelling under the same roof with Him. The perpetual lamp of the Sanctuary typifies their

unceasing adoration, representing them in some sort, insomuch as it symbolises the fervour of their love. This idea it was which prompted faithful souls in ages past to found perpetual lamps in holy places, giving money to supply them with oil, as when King Dagobert of France set aside a yearly rent to provide the perpetual lamp in the Abbey of St Denis. Even now there are not a few devout and loving souls who in this significant way strive to honour our Divine Saviour and His most Sacred Heart.

And so we quit the church, leaving our good angels behind us to say in our stead, again and again: "Blessed and praised every moment be Jesus Christ in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar."



CHAPTER IX

THE ABBOT

LET us remember our duty of calling upon the master of the house. All that we have hitherto heard or seen will have given us some insight into the life of the Abbey; but in order thoroughly to understand its spirit, we must observe the life, not only of the members of the monastic family, but also of its head. So let us go to the Abbot, for no one can instruct us so well as he. Some of our guests who are not visiting an abbey for the first time, ask where the Abbot's house is, and seem much surprised on being told that our Abbot has a cell in the common dormitory of the other fathers, though in a special part of it. The Abbot's apartments are, in fact, situated at the angle where the wing destined for guests joins the quadrangle of the main building; but since this, as we have said, is not the universal custom, it may be well to give here a few words of explanation.

There is a passage in the Holy Rule in which St Benedict says that "the Abbot shall take his meals with the guests and the pilgrims."

This was appointed in order that the community should remain undisturbed, and be able to serve God in holy recollection, and that at the same time the Abbot should be enabled to fulfil the duties of hospitality in a becoming manner. He was to receive the guests, to dine and converse with them in a room apart, and thus to bear a burden for which he was the most fitted. In this manner, towards the end of the Middle Ages, there arose the custom that even the dwelling of the Abbot should be separate from that of the monks, and therefore more easy of access for the guests; and this was the more necessary, as the larger and more wealthy abbeys were continually visited by a great number of persons, and the Abbot was usually a man of princely rank and a large landed proprietor. In those days stately companies of travellers came frequently to the great courtyard or "curia" of the abbey, and up the steps of the Abbot's lodgings clattered many a spurred and booted gentleman, many a knightly and noble pilgrim. Times are now changed, and our monasteries have once more regained their exclusively religious character. If they have not quite returned to the severe simplicity of the days of St. Robert, who used to sleep in the large open dorter in the midst of his monks, yet they are even further removed from the tumultuous surroundings of the later Middle Ages. Although the traditional virtue of hospitality, which is held so sacred by the Holy Rule, is not and cannot be neglected, it is not now practised to the same extent. In those days the monasteries were the

only hotels, the only refuges for the belated traveller or the wearied pilgrim ; whereas in our time travellers of every degree can find suitable entertainment, and thus the monastery may well confine itself to the reception of priests and religious, and the special friends or connections of the community. Therefore, since we are far from wishing to blame those who in ancient abbeys still retain the use of centuries, and keep the Abbot's dwelling where it was, let it not be taken amiss if, in newly-erected monasteries, we do not see the necessity for this separation. The advantages of our custom will be easily apparent, especially if our guests will now come with us to pay a visit to his lordship.

We may follow the Father Prior, who is just going towards the Abbot's room with a great bundle of letters and papers. He knocks, enters, and we follow. We find ourselves in a large comfortable room, lighted by long windows filled with stained glass. The crucifix holds the place of honour. The furniture is simple, but in accordance with the rank and position of an Abbot. No doubt he would far rather, like many a great and holy Abbot before him, inhabit an ordinary monk's cell, but his personal wishes have to be set aside, since he does not belong to himself, and both he and his room must be accessible both to his sons and to strangers. The bedroom next door is simpler, since in its retirement holy poverty may find a place. Another door, with a thick curtain before it, leads to the chapel in which the Abbot daily offers the Holy Sacrifice when he does not do so at the high altar,

as on Sundays and festivals. It is panelled with carved oak, hung with rich stuffs, and contains beautiful works of art, for in it dwells our dear Saviour, hidden in the Tabernacle. Constant intercourse with Him is a necessity of life to the Abbot; he is himself to be, as the Holy Rule says, a vicegerent of Christ: "*Christi enim agere vices in monasterio creditur*," and so has every reason to consult Him frequently by prayer.

The Abbot, a venerable man, with a gentle, spiritual countenance, is seated at his writing-table. Looking up from his work, which, often interrupted, is as promptly resumed, he beckons the Prior to come in and take his seat on a chair close to the writing-table. It is a noteworthy place, that room. How many have come there with over-burdened heart, and have found the consolation they sought. Here full many a doubt has been set at rest, many a heart been lightened by a gentle fatherly word, many a guilty conscience, too, has come here in sorrow and penitence, many a sinful soul has once again found peace, and many a heart, stubborn and hardened by self-will, has, by an earnest word of gentle exhortation, been recalled once more to its duty. Many a beginner in the religious life has here been initiated into the sacred principles of monastic observance, many a vocation has been settled here; to one the door of the noviceship has been thrown open, whilst to another has been pointed out a more suitable state of life in the world. Even our visitors find that room a pleasant place. Here they may be instructed in some of the mysteries of monastic life,

and be shown somewhat of the hidden beauty of the Religious Orders, or, perhaps, during a cheerful conversation, may all unknowing receive into their hearts some little seed that may bear rich fruit at a future day.

The Prior lays the day's post on the table; he opens the letters, which the Abbot looks over with him, or reads out to him, and they deliberate as to the answers. Business matters are, for the most part, given over to the Cellarer, some to the parish priest, and some to other fathers. Requests for aid in the care of souls, for missions, for sermons, and so on, are, after due consideration, either granted, or refused with regret if the fathers are already overburdened. However strong the desire to help wherever it is a case of winning souls, still, care for the peace of his own family, the community life of the house, and the due celebration of the Divine Office, must ever predominate. An aspirant writes to beg admission into the Order, and represents in burning words the yearning of his heart for the peace of the cloister. The Father Master may answer him, and make the necessary inquiries. The Abbot then sorts the rest of the letters, and looks over those that are to be sent out that day. In the family there are no secrets between father and son; and as the former seeks to exclude and ward off whatever might disturb the peace of his son's soul, so does the latter feel the need of communicating with his father as to all that occupies, rejoices, or disquiets him. In this way the families of all the religious are, as it were, taken into the heart of the monastic family. The Abbot looks

on the kinsfolk of his sons as connected with himself, and sympathises with them in all their joys and sorrows; he teaches his religious how to help them with good counsel, and thus extends to these families out in the world the blessed influences of the cloister. They, in their turn, become through their common interests more closely united with the monastery, and learn to look upon the Abbot as their own spiritual father.

The conversation of the superiors is respectfully interrupted. Here is a father come to beg a blessing before going out to visit a sick person; another has just returned from a parish where he was sent to preach. The Abbot inquires how things have gone with him, whether his sermon and his confessional were well attended, and how his strength has held out. The monk who had knelt down to receive the blessing has remained, with filial reverence, in the same posture during this short talk; he then humbly kisses the Abbot's ring, and withdraws. The Infirmarian replaces him, and gives the Abbot a short report of the sick brethren; how they have passed the night, and what remedies were applied till the doctor could arrive. Meanwhile the Prior has come to the end of his business; he has learnt the opinion of the Abbot, received his instructions, and goes now to carry them out. But the door opens again; one of the fathers from the artist's studio has brought some sketches and designs, which he submits to the Abbot for his approval. Then comes the Cellarer with his accounts, which he begs to have looked over; then the Hosteller, to give an account of the visitors who

arrived yesterday evening, and to inquire when he may bring one or other of them for a visit. Presently there is a signal from the telephone connected with the entrance door. Some strangers are there who beg leave to go over the monastery, others are asking to see one of the fathers, some young students apply for permission to stay for a few days and make the spiritual exercises ; all require an answer and decision. Then the Abbot has a moment's quiet ; he glances at the crucifix before him, and his pen begins again to glide rapidly over the paper. Soon, however, comes another knock—slight, hesitating, and timid. At the gentle "*Ave*" of the Abbot, a young monk enters, and remains modestly waiting at the door. The Abbot leaves off his writing, and signs to him to come near ; so he kneels down close beside him, and begins to open his heart to him. He seems much disturbed ; but a few gentle, earnest words from those fatherly lips soon touch the right chord in his heart, and restore his peace and confidence. The counsel and exhortations of this skilful guide of souls give him fresh courage, and with filial gratitude he kisses his father's hand, and leaves the room ; and then the Abbot rises too, and going into the chapel, kneels in fervent prayer before the most Blessed Sacrament placing anew the soul of this young religious, with all the others entrusted to his care, in the Heart of the Divine Redeemer.

What is the Abbot? We are now better able to reply to this inquiry. He is not merely a superior who has to watch over the house ; not only a rector who superintends a college, or a master, whose office

is to teach. He is all this, and far more, for he is a Father. It is true the Abbot is also a prelate, a prince of the Church, but higher far than that dignity is the one of fatherhood, whence all dignities and all duties spring. St Benedict commences his Rule with the chapter on the Abbot, for on him, as the foundation-stone, he founds his monastic community. It is to be a family, and therefore it must have a father; he is its beginning, its root, its vital principle, its head. It is to be the family of God, and possess the true spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." From God comes "all paternity in Heaven and on earth"; the earthly father is His representative, and that not only in the natural order, but in the spiritual also; and just as the earthly father is the instrument of God in the creation of the natural man, so is the Abbot the father of the monastic family, inasmuch as he begets the souls of its members to the life of perfection. Being dead to the world and to themselves by the holy vows, he arouses them to a new life in holy profession, and when the Abbot bends down from his seat before the altar, to give to the newly-professed monk the kiss of peace, he may then truly say to him, "Thou art my son, for in Christ Jesus have I begotten thee."

The tendency of the Rule, the whole secret of monastic life, the true sense and significance of this sacrifice of the will and of liberty, rests on the lively, firm belief, that the Abbot represents Christ, that he is the visible representative of the paternity of God, that he is, in fact, our spiritual father. Without this faith the monastic life is foolishness, but with it, it is

the truest wisdom. It is on the deepening of this faith that the spiritual progress of a monk depends. No one can by nature have any power over others; God alone has authority over every creature, and if we submit our free-will, that precious gift of God, freely and willingly to another mortal, we can only do so reasonably, in order to acknowledge the supreme authority of God, which we honour in that mortal as the Divine representative. Nowhere, then, should authority be firmer and more unquestioned than in the monastic family, the very foundation of which is faith; nowhere, however, will corruption penetrate more deeply and more rapidly, if this solid groundwork be wanting.

It was for this reason that our Holy Father St Benedict gave to his Order the form of a family, of which the Abbot is the father, in the truest and fullest sense of the word. Can one change one's father? Certainly not, and the Abbot just as little, according to the sense of the Holy Rule. He is not only espoused to his religious family, and wears its ring, but he is intimately connected with each member of it, by the bonds of spiritual paternity. This idea of indissoluble union, and hence of the life-long government of the Abbot, "*Semel abbas, semper abbas*," was lost for a long time in many places, and therewith also the understanding of its meaning. "But what if the Abbot prove unworthy?" some one may ask. "What if a Bishop be unworthy?" is the natural retort. God rules His Church by human agents; He it is who holds the thread of all Christian family life, as of each religious family. There are, no

doubt, unprincipled and even wicked fathers, but can we, or ought we, on this account, to do away with paternal authority?

An Abbot who is only elected for a given number of years is, as it were, but an official, and not a father. He has not grown up, body and soul, together with his family; he will leave to his successor the task of correcting abuses; he does his duty if he maintains the due observance of the Rule, and preserves order, but he is not responsible for the souls of those who heed not his reproofs. Herein lies the most important significance of the abbatial dignity. Our Holy Father St Benedict has not only conferred upon the Abbot a plenitude of authority exceeding that of all other religious superiors, but he has laid upon him, as a counterpoise, the full responsibility for the souls of all his sons. As it is only a father who can wield such unlimited authority, so it is but a father who can bear such a vast responsibility alone. The power of the Abbot is limited and regulated by his responsibility. On the one hand, the Holy Rule enjoins as to most points in the monastic life, "Let the Abbot order things as he thinks best;" the Abbot regulates the measure of food, the kind of clothing, the dwelling, the division of time and of labour; "nothing is to be done without the consent of the Abbot." The Prior, the Deans or Seniors, can only act with the permission of the Abbot, and can do nothing without his leave. But on the other hand, our Holy Father says, "Let the Abbot always remember what he is, and what he is called; let him know that more will be required of him to whom more has been entrusted; let

him consider how difficult a task it is to govern souls, and to be a pattern to all. Let him remember that he will have to render account of his doctrine, as well as of the obedience of his disciples, and that before the awful judgment seat of God, and that he will there be made answerable for every sheep that has been lost." By word and example, by severity and gentleness, by zeal and patience, by showing himself chaste and pious, meek and merciful, prudent and self-sacrificing, he must govern with that wise discretion which our Holy Father calls "the mother of the virtues." Conscious of his high dignity, but at the same time of his heavy responsibility, he will fill his exalted position in the strength of God, with power and gentleness, careful both for the corporal and spiritual welfare of his sons, and thus be to them the true vicegerent of the heavenly Father. "The name of Father," says Tertullian, "expresses at once both power and loving solicitude." Such examples of patriarchal power and dignity are truly hard to find in these days, except, perhaps, here and there, amongst the English, Breton, or Flemish upper classes. I once saw just such a venerable old man, who, every night before retiring to rest, gave his blessing to his son, although the latter was a priest, making the sign of the Cross on his brow, as if he were still a child, and the son received this blessing with reverently bowed head.

It is customary for the Abbot to assemble the community daily, in order to break to them the spiritual bread of instruction, either by explaining to them the Holy Scriptures, or by dwelling on the

lessons suggested by the feast of the day, or again by drawing from some scientific or ascetic work somewhat to instruct and edify them.

We must remember that the monastic family has no mother, therefore the Abbot must have also a mother's care for it. Like the "valiant woman" so extolled by Solomon, he gives them their food and drink, "he clothes them against the winter's cold, he looks after the house and lands, he opens his hand to the poor and his arms to the needy, he puts his hand to great things, and does not overlook even the smallest." Day and night he is at the service of his children, sharing in their joys and sorrows, their labour and their privations. He is their consolation in sickness, their support in struggles and difficulties; he stands beside them at the hour of death and closes their eyes, the last grateful glance of which has sought for his parting blessing. Do not turn away and say that this is but the ideal representation of an Abbot, and that, as such, it has no real existence. It is in truth an ideal which we here depict, but every good monk will recognise in the picture his own Abbot. The love of the sons, enlightened as it is by faith, ignores the faults and shortcomings of human weakness in the beloved person of their Abbot. Visitors who come amongst us for the first time are perhaps surprised when they see how the monks kneel to kiss the Abbot's ring, or to hand him holy water, and with what reverence they bow before him and speak to him. They will understand now that it is because in the Abbot we recognise St Benedict himself, and honour in his

person Christ our Lord. This is why he wears the cross upon his breast, and bears in his hand the crozier; this is why his head is crowned with the mitre. Now, too, it will be seen how it is that religious brethren of different countries and varied stations bear such a strong family likeness one to the other, a likeness more remarkable than that of natural brothers. After having died to the world, and been born again to a new life in the religious family, they grow up together in it; having become children once more, they imbibe the milk of spiritual instruction, and together with the dress, outward appearance, and exterior manner of life, they clothe themselves also with the spirit of their religious family, and become like one another in thought, word, and action. This transformation is necessary for the acquirement of true religious stability, "Unless you be converted, and become as little children, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." The novices must become as children again, in that higher and spiritual sense which our Saviour's words imply. The new birth in holy Profession, like that in holy Baptism, is a work of the Divine Spirit. He chooses whom He will, He prepares them for it, and will accomplish it in them; we can but receive His action with astonishment, humbly correspond with it, rejoicingly thank Him for it, and, full of confidence, go on perseveringly. The newly professed religious has left his earthly family, and renounced his right to found a family himself. In exchange, he has become a member of the monastic family of God, and according to the promise of Jesus Christ, he has received a

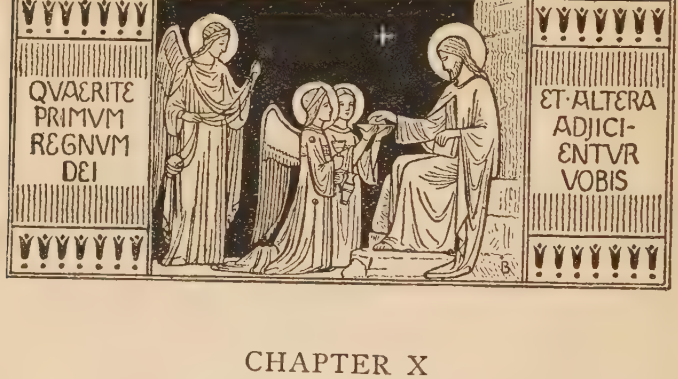
hundredfold in return for all he has left. He has not only gained a father, who represents to him the power and justice, the dignity and wisdom, the kindness and compassion of his heavenly Father, but also brethren who show him a purer and more unselfish affection than that of his own brothers and sisters, and who, having all been brought together by the same Spirit, pursue the same path to one common end.

Has the young monk then forgotten his earthly family? Is he lost to his relatives? They seem to fear it, and so we must hasten to console them. In nowise are those bonds sundered by which God united him with his father and mother, brothers and sisters—they have only become stronger, purer, and more spiritual. Even in the very best and holiest of families there must be at times a certain amount of friction. In spite of the fondest affection on all sides, little things occur every day which cause our faulty characters to clash, which lead to disputes and vexations. Can we say that this is not the case, and does not filial and fraternal affection suffer from these imperfections? Is not this very affection but too often mingled with some self-seeking and much self-will? The son or brother, the daughter or sister, who has left you for God's sake, and is thus withdrawn from daily intercourse with you, and from all the little human weaknesses that it brought out, will soon appear to you in quite a different light. Your love has not grown less—nay, on the contrary, it has become stronger, but now it is not so much for the person merely, but rather for that person as con-

secrated to God, and therefore it has become more pure. You look upon that son or daughter as already a superior being, and he, or she, in consequence must hasten to make due progress in the way of perfection, so as to keep pace with the idea you have formed; and again, if perchance your children in the cloister are not yet so holy as you believe them to be, one thing at least they certainly do, they pray for you, their parents and families, and for all your cares and intentions. They are of more use to you than if they were at home with you, though of course this is only evident to the eye of faith; you are the better for thinking about them, and become insensibly united more and more closely with that religious community to which your child belongs. You have a share in their progress and in their anxieties, but also in their blessings and graces, and thus you also receive your part of the hundredfold reward promised to them. This is a very natural process after all, and serves to explain in great measure the influence exercised by the cloister over a believing people and country.

The history of Cluny presents a most brilliant example of the influence, rich in blessings, which one single abbey, guided by holy men filled with the Spirit of God, can exercise on a whole period. The powerful Abbots of that Monastery, St Odo, St Majolus, St Odilo, and St Hugh (who between them ruled it for over a century and a half), were the friends and counsellors of Popes, as well as of the German Emperors, the Kings of France and Spain, and of many other princes. These men, who were

animated by one and the same spirit, which they diffused throughout Europe for well-nigh two centuries, owed their whole greatness to the paternal authority and wisdom with which they ruled their religious family, and hence the whole family of Christendom united in reverencing them. Those days are over; the spirit which animated them is understood no longer, but whether the change be for the advantage of the nation, we will not take upon us to decide.



CHAPTER X

THE FRATER OR REFECTORY

WITH slow and long resounding strokes the clock in the tower announces the dinner hour; the twelfth stroke has scarcely sounded before the church bell begins to ring the Angelus. Work has already been stopped by a previous signal, and most of the monks have spent the last few minutes before the Most Holy in the church or in the Abbot's chapel, in order to end the first half of the day, and to begin the latter half, with God. Others have all kinds of household business to see to. But, wherever they may be, going or standing, in the choir, in the cell, in the corridors or on the stairs, at the first stroke of this bell all fall to prayer. The angel of the Lord hovers over the cloister and announces the mystery of the Incarnation, and we adore it, with ever fresh reverence and thanksgiving, three times a day upon our knees.

And now there is movement on all sides; at the sound of the house bell, the convent assembles from all parts in the Frater, the broad double doors of which are thrown wide open. Each on entering takes holy water, or receives it from the one who precedes him; he bows profoundly before the great crucifix, which occupies the centre of the wall at the upper end of the room, and goes quickly and quietly to his place. There he stands in front of the table, his hands beneath his scapular, and his eyes fixed on the ground. The Abbot also has come in, and a young novice, quaintly called the semi-Abbot, kneeling, hands him the holy water. The Hosteller has brought in the visitors, and placed them at a separate table. In a few minutes all are assembled. Punctuality is not only the "courtesy of kings" and a military duty, it belongs also to monastic discipline, and is strictly enforced from principles of order, asceticism, and obedience, and our Holy Father St Benedict has appointed in a chapter of his Holy Rule penances for all "who come late to the work of God, or to table."

The doors are closed, the clear sonorous voice of the Abbot breaks the profound silence: *Benedicite* is repeated by a hundred powerful voices; the prayer, intoned by the Superior, is sung, the great room resounding with the praise of God. *Oculi omnium:* "The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season" (Ps. cxliv). The Abbot then gives the blessing; he blesses those present and their food, also the Reader, who goes into the middle of the room, bows profoundly, and

asks for the benediction. Then all sit down, and deep silence reigns.

The Reader has gone up into the pulpit, which juts out from the wall half-way down the Frater, and making the sign of the Cross, he begins, *In nomine Domini nostri Jesu Christi.* He first sings in a solemn tone a few verses from Holy Scripture, whilst all the brethren, their heads covered with their hoods, listen with devout respect to the word of God. The guests, who are placed by the side of the Abbot at a table covered with a white cloth, lay down again the napkins they have already taken up, when they see that the monks are sitting motionless, and that no one touches the basin of soup that is before him until the Abbot gives the sign. Some of the visitors are very evidently surprised, but not unpleasantly so, by the gravity of the scene. It is not here as in the world, where, after a hurried sign of the Cross, people begin at once to eat amidst noisy greetings and conversation; clearly the Frater is no common dining-room. We will make the most of this pause, as our eyes are not bound to conventual custody, and look about us a little in this strange sanctuary. The Refectory—how often has this word sounded mysteriously, and yet attractively, in our ears. A monastic Refectory. Our moralists and *genre* painters, although they knew no more about it than we did, have with much play of imagination made out such a Refectory to be a very enjoyable place. We were led to expect good meals, and yet better wine, cheerful countenances, and all kinds of diversions. But nothing of all this is to be found here. We feel that it is a

pleasant place, but not a luxurious one. There is an atmosphere of holy gravity, and, as it were, a kind of consecration about this great room. And, indeed, the Frater is a fine and spacious apartment. The floor is paved with flags; round the long walls, pannelled in oak, run oaken benches, before which stand heavy tables, the polished surface of which is not hidden by a cloth. The senior fathers sit at the upper end of the room, and the others in long rows, down to the lay-brothers. The Abbot has the place of honour, at the top of the room beneath the crucifix, and takes his meals at a small table on a raised daïs. The bright, cheerful light streams in through the richly-coloured windows, and falls on the appropriate frescoes which adorn the walls, whilst above them rises the vaulted roof, resembling that of the church itself.

This hasty look around, during the short pause which the whole community has kept in profound stillness, has served to show us that this grand room, with which the modest arrangements of the dinner-tables and the simple meal would seem so little to correspond, must have some more important significance than that of any ordinary dining-room. After the choir, the chapter-house alone is built and decorated with so much care. Is it perchance a family room, a place for meeting in common, on occasions not connected with the Divine worship, or a kind of parlour where the monastic family can meet their guests in pleasant converse? In many monasteries this certainly is the case, and there the Refectory assumes a somewhat more comfortable

appearance, and a pleasant, hospitable warmth. In our Abbey this is not customary. Except at the hours appointed for meals, the Frater is never entered, and never may a word be spoken there aloud. This prohibition which makes it a place of silence gives it at once a special character, and causes it to rank amongst the principal places of regular observance; its relatively beautiful decoration points to a predominant significance, and we will try to give our guests some short explanation of this monastic dining-room.

But now the Abbot gives the signal with the little wooden hammer lying before him, the hoods are thrown back, and all begin their repast, but with a quietness which surprises us, and through which the clear, strong voice of the Reader easily makes itself heard. Our Holy Rule says, "So great is to be the silence that no voice, no whispering, is to be heard, but only the voice of the Reader." Two servers, an old father and a young cleric (wearing white aprons, in token of their office), have gone into the middle of the room, and after a profound inclination before the crucifix, have begun their service. They glance over the tables with watchful eye, to see if any of the brethren are in want of anything, and they go noiselessly about from table to table. Lay-brothers carrying heavily laden trays of great vegetable dishes come in from the serving-room between the Refectory and the kitchen, and their load is distributed among the different tables. Then the dishes pass from hand to hand; a substantial dish of fish or eggs has already been portioned out in the kitchen,

and the servers place a plateful before each religious, who receives it with a bow of the head. The Abbot has been served before the rest by the elder of the two servers, who has placed before him exactly the same food as that of the other religious, neatly served up on little dishes. Then comes the turn of the guests, who are served somewhat more carefully than the rest of the community, although they usually show their preference for monastic fare. The fathers are given two courses, so that, as the Holy Rule says, "He who cannot eat of the one may make his meal of the other." The lay-brothers have simpler but more nutritious food, such as they require to carry on their hard corporal labour. All are taken care of by the servers, who go up and down the room, and the watchful eye of the Fraterer, who is charged with the superintendence of the Refectory, looks to see that all comes at its proper time, "so that nothing be wanting at the table of the brethren." All receive what they require in due measure and at the proper time.

Our body requires nourishment, and its refreshment is a necessity imposed on us by God, which we may moderate and regulate, indeed, but which we neither can nor ought to cut off altogether. He gave to the first man for food all the plants and roots of the earth, and after the flood He granted Noah permission to eat the flesh of beasts also. He even visited Abraham himself, and deigned to accept hospitality at his hands. He fed the Israelites in the wilderness with miraculous bread, and led them forth into "a land flowing with milk and honey."

He provided nourishment for Elias, and sent food to Daniel in the lions' den. God has not only given us permission to fortify our bodies with food, but He has made it a duty to do so, and therefore the partaking of the noonday meal belongs to the precepts of monastic rule, and no one should, of his own will, absent himself from it.

Besides, this taking of meals in common is a natural requirement. The desire for society during meals has been found natural to all human beings, and in all ages has been expressed after one fashion or another. We judge of the manners of a people, their degree of culture and civilisation, by the way they conduct themselves at banquets and feasts. We may consult this barometer not only as to exterior manners, but also as to genuine virtue, and may judge a company by their cheerful unconstraint at their festivities. This is why, a short time ago, a warm friend of our Monastery said: "I have just had a deep insight into religious life in the Refectory, and it has greatly edified me. At church we all pray together—the prince, the citizen, and the peasant; but at table, we are children of the world, we enjoy ourselves and chat as we please, and will not be disturbed by serious thoughts. In the cloister, on the contrary, the very meals become a pious exercise, during which our souls are fed and our bodies are kept under strict constraint." Thus we see that the good spirit, which pervades the cloister, finds its best expression in the Frater. The necessity of nature becomes ennobled by religious customs, and is raised to an act of Divine worship. The combat between

the flesh and the spirit is as old as human nature itself; when the vice of intemperance had reached its utmost height in the effeminate Roman empire, our Divine Saviour appeared to restore the equilibrium between them, or rather the rational dominion of the latter over the former. Living as man amongst men, He shared and sanctified all their necessities, even supplying the wine that was wanting, when a guest at the marriage in Cana. We find Him at the Publican's as well as at the Pharisee's; He eats with the Disciples, and after His Resurrection He breaks bread with them at Emmaus. Everywhere we admire in him the same condescending love, the same gentle humility. Jesus shows us how to receive and to enjoy, and yet to shun excess. His disciples understood the lesson and practised it: when the Bridegroom was taken away from them they fasted. The early Christians kept their body in subjection, but they knew also how to make the common meal a feast of love. We admire the severe penance of the fathers of the desert, of an Hilarion, who lived for years on a few lentils steeped in cold water; or of a Nilus, who, during the forty days' fast, lived only on the Body of the Lord. But they acted thus in solitude, in the community life they avoided singularity, and tempered austerity with love and humility. When a brother, who was in a strange monastery, once said: "I never eat anything boiled," one of the fathers remarked: "It would have been better to have eaten meat all night than thus to have made known your fasting before all the brethren."

Fasting is a holy exercise, and one practised by

Christ Himself. St Basil says: "Moses ascended the holy mountain fasting, and he would not otherwise have dared to approach its smoking summit, whilst below gluttony led the people away into idolatry." "Fasting leads to God, sensuality causes the loss of our salvation."

Monastic life regulates the austerity of fasting by precepts common to all. The Holy Rule names as the eighth degree of humility, "if a monk do nothing but what is prescribed by the Rule and example of the seniors," and prescribes that he should only undertake a practice of penance with the consent and blessing of his Superior, lest it be spoilt by arrogance or vain-glory.

Abstinence from meat is also a time-honoured custom, which may have originated from the fact that, before the Fall, human nature did not require meat. Meat has a special attraction for the senses, and for this reason many saints and innumerable holy persons consecrated to God, under both the old and new covenant, have renounced the use of it entirely. If ancient austerity made such abstinence a rule in well-nigh all the earlier orders, we still hold this practice in high honour by abstaining as far as our weaker constitutions will admit. In our monastery meat is allowed on Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays; in Advent, on Sundays and Thursdays only, and not at all in Lent.

A prudent moderation which, as St Augustine says, causes one to take food as one would take medicine, is salutary both for body and soul. In manifold ways monastic asceticism has been mindful

to make the Frater its exercising ground. Not only does the crucifix over the Abbot's seat, with its touching inscription, SITIO ("I thirst,") preach to us powerfully of abstemiousness and mortification, but the mind itself is supplied with rich nourishment, and drawn away from earthly food towards Him who has provided it.

The Reader, after he has sung a few verses of Holy Scripture, has passed on to read some passages from the history of the Church. He reads in a very simple manner, clearly, and with good articulation. Historical events of stirring times, bloody battles, ecclesiastical difficulties, portraits of holy men and women, all pre-ordained by the mysterious decrees of Divine Providence, pass slowly and solemnly before the spiritual eye of the religious. His thoughts cannot tarry amongst plates and dishes, but are carried away and caught by the words of the Reader. As St Basil says: "Let not the mind be fixed on the dish, but on God." Not in vain do we see placed in front of the Reader's pulpit the legend: CIBUS CIBO MELIOR ("A nourishment better than food"); not in vain has the Reader received a special blessing in the midst of the choir before taking up his Office for the week. "O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall declare Thy praise," he repeated three times, and thrice the choir echoed his petition. And then the Abbot prayed, "O Lord, take away from Thy servant the spirit of arrogance and ignorance, so that filled with the spirit of humility and understanding, he may grasp the sense of the holy reading." Thus in the monastery

every act is begun with prayer and with the Abbot's blessing.

The subject-matter chosen for the reading at table is selected by the librarian, subject to the approval of the Superior. It varies according to circumstances or the requirements of the moment. Sometimes an interesting biography is introduced; sometimes a report as to the ecclesiastical or political affairs of the day. On Festivals there may be something appropriate to the mystery commemorated; in Lent we like to read some devout commentary on the sufferings of our Divine Saviour. The dinner-table talk and speeches which serve to enliven secular festivities find here a striking counterpart in the reading, which is often by far more effective and enthralling. And thus the strict silence of the Frater becomes reasonable, pleasant, and natural.

In many monasteries it is customary on feast days, and when visitors are present, to break off the reading and to permit free conversation. In our Abbey this is never the case; even when guests of the highest rank are present the silence is never broken, and probably it is precisely such guests as these who find it far from unpleasant once in a while to be officially silent. How often in the world are all kinds of useless and foolish things said at banquets. How grand and dignified, on the other hand, is the silence of the monastic Frater.

Even apparently necessary speaking is avoided there; servers, carvers, hosteller, and brothers, seek

to make their meaning understood, as well as may be, by signs. Our predecessors were more experienced in this than we are, and they had a complete and most expressive language of signs. Even the accidental noises incidental to a crowded Refectory are guarded against as far as may be, and should they occur, are atoned for by a public satisfaction. We may see that young father who, for having made a slight disturbance, has gone to kneel down in the middle of the Frater, until the Abbot gives the sign to permit him to rise. But we see yonder one of the older fathers, a venerable monk, on his knees; what can he have done amiss? The Abbot gives him a sign, he rises, bows, and another takes his place, and, if we see aright, he has in his hand the pieces of a broken plate. Then we remember the accusations in Chapter. Monastic property is God's property, and any damage done to the least thing must be atoned for. Here is, then, the due performance of the penance imposed at Chapter. In the Frater, at table, the very place where people in the world are most unwilling to be disturbed, or to be reminded of faults or of obligations, it is here that in the monastery penances are done humbly and quietly. All this shows us that if monastic discipline be well observed and respected in the Frater, it is indeed a holy and sanctifying place. This, no doubt, is partly why outside its doors we often find the marble basin wherein the monks, before entering, used always to wash their hands, just as the priest does before Holy Mass. And besides these, there were a number of other beautiful cere-

monies and usages, connected with the Frater, which are for the most part lost to us. Nevertheless we have yet retained a whole series of traditional regulations which have descended to us as monastic customs, tending chiefly to restrain over-indulgence of the palate.

The best of mortifications consists in not being dainty in picking and choosing, and this is, moreover, a mark of good breeding. It is very likely easier to some to fast than to eat something they are disinclined for, and do not like. Is not such a fault usually the result of being badly brought up? The good old custom in families, that the children were to eat what was set before them, is rapidly dying out, and this is all of a piece with many other breaches of discipline. In the monastery we do not dine *à la carte*, but gratefully partake of whatever may be served to us. It is not granted to all, as to St Bernard, to shed tears when obliged to go to table, but every one can do as St Teresa did, thank God at each mouthful that He so kindly cares for us. This we should do all the more, inasmuch as like the birds of heaven we place ourselves at a well-supplied table, which we have not provided for ourselves.

One of the ancient fathers once saw in spirit, how one brother was eating honey, another bread, and another dirt, and yet all had the same food. And he was afterwards instructed in this wise: "Those who eat honey are such as place themselves at table with fear and trembling, and whilst eating never cease praying. Those who eat bread are they who contentedly and

thankfully enjoy what God has bestowed upon them. Those who eat dirt are they that murmur and say: "That is good, this is not good, I like this, I can't bear that." It was not without cause that our Holy Father would have all murmuring utterly abolished from the cloister, and hence it is forbidden ever to talk about eating and food.

What is said of eating applies still more to drinking. We see before each of the fathers a glass of beer or water, only a few of the older monks or those in delicate health have a little wine placed before them. Our Holy Father, though he preferred to see his monks abstain altogether, has yet in his paternal kindness permitted a certain measure of wine. Temperance is the mother of chastity, and above all does it become monks and priests. How can those lips, which in the morning were steeped in the Blood of our Divine Lord, be given over the same day to intemperance? The monastic meal is an *Agape*, or *Love-Feast*, in the sense of the early Christians. We meet in common to recruit our strength, and to praise God for His mercies. This union is important for the promotion of the family spirit and of fraternal charity. The chief exercise of charity falls to the share of the servers, who, on this account, receive every Sunday after Lauds their special blessing, which was prescribed by our Holy Father himself. The servers whose week is ended kneel in the middle of the choir, and thank God who has helped them to fulfil their office; whereupon the Abbot, in the prayer of blessing, implores for them a heavenly reward. Then come those who are entering on their week's

service, and sing thrice the invocation: "*Deus in adjutorium meum intende: Domine ad adjuvandum me festina*" ("O God, incline unto mine aid; O Lord, make haste to help me"), which is in turn thrice repeated by the choir. Then the Abbot gives them his blessing, that "with single hearts they may serve their brethren," and thus consoled they enter on their Office. We have seen how quickly and how diligently they hasten up and down on their charitable mission. Their watchful eye spies out everything that is missing, sees every want, understands at once every sign, and is unwearied in its attention. Serving at table is above all things a labour of love, and is therefore undertaken with joy by all the brethren from the Prior down to the youngest novice. But we do not see those who best serve the Convent—the good brothers in the kitchen, who work for all, care for all, and are the instruments of the Divine bounty. Not until all the rest have finished their meal do they sit down to table, with the reader and the servers, to take their well-earned refreshment.

The monastic meal is taken in common, and not even the observance of silence can deprive it of the advantages of this. The fraternal spirit finds expression in the kind and watchful attention shown by one to the other. It is, in fact, a monastic custom for no one to take care of himself, not even to show by a sign that something is wanted, or that he has been overlooked. He must sit still, and rejoice that a little penance has thus unobserved been imposed upon him. But it has already been noticed by his attentive

neighbour, and he has made a sign to the server, who promptly supplies the omission, with a gesture of apology. Amongst the Egyptian monks of old, it was the custom at meals to lower the hood over the face so completely that only one's own plate could be seen, and not that of one's neighbour. What these worthy ancients gained in recollection, they lost so far as acts of charity were concerned. In our monasteries custody of the eyes is to be duly observed, but not to our neighbour's cost, and it is not unlawful to exchange a significant glance at any striking passage of the reading, since this serves to enhance the common enjoyment.

From the raised place where the guests are seated, we can survey the long rows of religious at table, so varied in age and feature, and yet so much alike in the fraternal spirit that animates them. If their angel guardians would tell us the story of their lives, of their errors maybe, and of the way by which they were led to steer their barques into this quiet haven, how should we marvel at the miracles of divine grace! Of every rank and station, of every age and calling, from many a different land, they have been sought out by the predestinating grace of God, and brought together here under the mantle of St Benedict. And now they are all sitting together, side by side on the modest wooden benches, the pastor of the country village, and the canon of the Cathedral Chapter, the professor and the engineer, the merchant and the soldier, and no one but the Abbot knows what their past has been. We will not inquire into it either; what is it to us what

they were in the world? they are monks now, and members of the monastic family.

Special feasts, such as the name's day of the Abbot or the greater festivals of the Church, are solemnised in the richly decorated Frater. At Christmas, a crib, surrounded with flowers and lights, is set up in the centre of the room; at Easter the Paschal lamb is brought in; and on other feasts of note there is served up what is called a *Caritas* or *Loving-dish*, of which each one takes a small portion for charity's sake, and in token of the common joy. Before one of the fathers yonder there is a fine bouquet of flowers, although he does not seem to pay much attention to it; it is his name's day, and yesterday evening, on leaving the Frater, he was greeted by all the brethren with good wishes and promises of prayers. But what does that crucifix mean, which is standing before that empty but well-served place? It was the seat of a brother lately dead. For thirty days Christ Crucified takes his place, and receives the food that would have been served to him, and which is afterwards bestowed upon some poor men at the cloister door. This touching custom was observed in all the monasteries of the Middle Ages.

The monastic meal has a yet higher meaning, it is a type of the marriage supper of the Lamb. The brethren in the Frater must ever bear in mind that they are called to be guests at this royal banquet in Heaven. They think of that Living Bread, with which their Lord and God fed them at early morn, and they yearn one day to be

numbered amongst His companions at His eternal feast. Therefore does the Abbot say, when blessing the table, "*May the King of Eternal Glory bring us to be partakers of His heavenly banquet.*" How often does our Divine Teacher compare the joys prepared for His elect to a royal banquet, at which He Himself will go about serving them? "And let the just feast and rejoice before God and be delighted with gladness" (Ps. lxvii. 4).

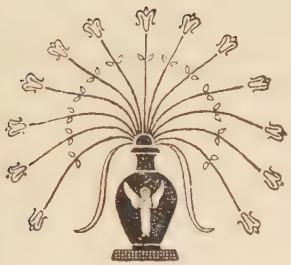
The Cœnaculum where the Last Supper took place was the first Christian Refectory, and as our Saviour Himself handed food to His Apostles there, so does the Abbot serve his brethren every year on Maundy Thursday in the Frater, after the solemn washing of feet has taken place in the Choir. Thus the Frater is full of sacred associations, and we can understand the reverence with which it is treated.

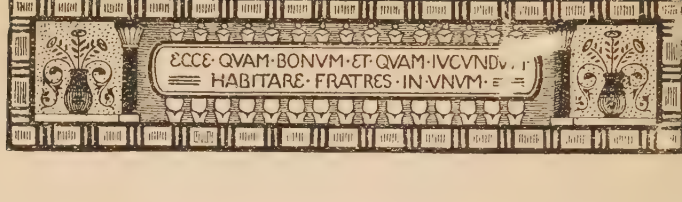
But our meditations threaten to last longer than the meal of the monks. They have already finished, and are enjoying all the more freely the spiritual food of the reading, for, "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." The servers have rapidly cleared away the plates and dishes on trays, which the lay-brother who is helping them carries back to the kitchen. And now the elder server brings two empty plates, hands one to the Abbot first of all, and then gives them to the fathers. On either side, the plate goes from hand to hand, and each brother carefully sweeps his little heap of crumbs off the table into the plate which he holds under it. This is an old

monastic custom. As our Saviour, after having miraculously fed His Disciples, made them collect together the fragments that remained in baskets, so does monastic discipline take good care that nothing be wasted. If these breadcrumbs serve no other purpose than to feed the birds of the air, they at any rate remind us how precious are the gifts of God. He Himself confirmed this practice by a miracle. St Odo of Cluny had one day, according to his custom, carefully collected the crumbs in his hand, and was about to put them in his mouth, but spellbound by what was being read he forgot to do so, until, at the sign of the Abbot, all rose from table. St Odo had the crumbs still in his hand, but he no longer dared to eat them, as the meal was ended, so, humbly kneeling down, he accused himself of his neglect. The Abbot bade him open his hand, and lo, it contained not crumbs but costly pearls. The Abbot commanded that the heavenly gems should be used to decorate a chasuble, and this holy vestment was long preserved with religious care at Cluny.

There is once more profound quiet. Then is heard the sharp stroke of the little hammer, with which the Abbot gives the signal. The Reader breaks off in the midst of a word. He comes down, and concludes his office with a profound inclination, singing, "*Tu autem Domine miserere nobis.*" "*Deo gratias*" resounds from the lips of all. The religious then rise and place themselves in front of the tables. After the grace said by the Abbot, the Cantor intones the *Miserere*, and in solemn procession,

beginning with the youngest, they go to the choir, singing the penitential psalm in alternate strains. There they end their grace and adore the Dispenser of their daily food in the mystery of His sacramental veil of bread.





CHAPTER XI

RECREATION

WITH the Abbot at their head, the monks have left the Church. For a few minutes they seem to mix all together, as doves do when the dovecot is opened. Here and there one steps aside, beckons another into a window niche, and rapidly settles some matter of business, or begs some permission from a Superior; but soon the crowd parts and passes, by different doors, out into the large garden, which is bright with the noonday sunshine. It surrounds the Abbey and the Church on three sides, and has all the character of a monastic domain—it is for use and for refreshment, for work and for prayer. The verdant lawns are edged by flower-beds brilliant with a hundred sparkling hues. Banks and terraces lead down to grassy slopes, at the foot of which babbles a laughing stream that widens out into a succession of noble fish-ponds. In one part, vegetables and fruit have their domain, and long glass-houses speak of the industry and of the skill of the brother-gardeners. In another, the broad gravel paths lead to a delightful wood, where lofty forest trees wave overhead, and the

thrushes sing perpetually amid the waving boughs. Ferns and wildflowers carpet all the ground, and through skilfully contrived openings in the undergrowth we catch glimpses of the smiling valley with its cornfields spread out at our feet. The monks, we see, have quickly divided into three groups, which seek their common recreation in cheerful conversation in different parts of the garden. One set, which consists of the priests of the monastery, clusters around the Abbot, whom we can distinguish by his pectoral cross. They walk in long rows up and down the broad pathway, and we are interested to notice that one half walks backwards, so as to have their faces always turned towards the opposite side, and thus to keep the conversation centred in one circle. Yonder, in that shady alley of chestnut trees, we see another group of younger monks, whose cheerful laughter is heard in the distance; they are the clerics or students of theology. And the novices—we know them by their short scapulars—maintain still their mysterious hidden life, and disappear from our sight to betake themselves to their own cherished playground in the wood. Everywhere we are met by cheerful countenances and laughing eyes; it is as if, with the observance of silence, they have cast off the restraints of exterior gravity also, and they seem to meet each other with the cordial heartiness of friends who have been long parted.

Before, however, we visit any of the separate groups, we see our visitors need some explanations. Clearly some of them are quite surprised to find that these

monks can be so genuinely merry and cheerful, and we must therefore beg to inform them that natural, innocent gaiety, is very much at home in the cloister. The sons and daughters of St Francis know this right well, and, after the example of their seraphic father, they cultivate in an especial way this child-like cheerfulness. But in the monasteries of St Benedict also, from olden days down to our own, the spirit of joy and gladness has ever been found in every family of God, for it is a sign of Christian simplicity. There is a time for everything, recollection at prayer, energy at work, gaiety at recreation.

Recreation is a time of refreshment and relaxation for body and spirit, and it is for this purpose that the monastic family are now together. Before the violinist lays aside his bow, he loosens the strings; a good horseman, who has to go a long journey, varies his pace, letting his steed from time to time go as he will, and slackening his pull on the bridle. Human nature needs refreshment. Body and mind cannot be continually on the stretch without harm; timely relaxation renews the strength of both, and restores elasticity to the mind. Now, a monk is a human being, and as such, stands in need of refreshment. St Hildegarde says, "it is not human never to speak," hence our holy Father St Benedict has given the Abbot power to grant free intercourse between the monks at fitting times, and after such a period of recreation they will be all the more strictly and exactly bound to silence.

And again, recreation has an important significance in the spiritual life and perfecting of the individual.

Our Constitutions say on this point: "Let the brethren know that this interruption of prayer and labour is equally consecrated to God, so that they may rival one another in the practice of humility and charity, showing mutual love with genuine cordiality, such as may render them truly modest, self-forgetful, kind, gentle, patient, simple, cheerful, ready to help each other, and seeking to become all things to all men." And this love, the distinguishing mark and adornment of a family consecrated to God, will draw down upon them the good pleasure and favour of the Divine Spouse, "whose delights are to be with the children of men."

All monastic life has its roots in this family spirit, and every religious community, by whatever Rule it may be bound, or by whatever habit distinguished, must be penetrated with it, for the imitation of Jesus Christ consists before all else in this spirit of mutual charity: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one for another" (St John xiii, 35). And the Benedictine Order ought to be most conspicuously distinguished by this mark of fraternal charity, since, as we have already stated, its fundamental idea is that of a family, grouped around their common father. Its members, by their vow of stability, are bound together in one body, and pledged to strive after a common end. And it is this family spirit, this mutual charity, which pervades the whole Rule of St Benedict. All that tends to foster this spirit belongs to the very essence of the life of the Order, and hence this hour of common recreation

is of the greatest importance in a Benedictine monastery.

The example of ordinary life may read us the same lesson. A house in which the free hours are a time of pleasant companionship for all the members, a time of peaceful, happy family enjoyment, deserves rightly the name of a Christian home, and offers strong guarantees of solid and lasting contentment amongst its inmates. "How good and pleasant it is," sings the Psalmist, "for brethren to dwell together in unity." As the Abbey rises high above the smoke of the cottages in the valley, so is its family raised above all petty, sordid cares of earth, and can hold its head higher and breathe a freer and serener air. The sacred words of Holy Writ may well be applied to it: "How beautiful are thy tabernacles, O Jacob, and thy tents, O Israel. As woody valleys, as watered gardens near the rivers, as tabernacles which the Lord has pitched, as cedars by the waterside."

Entranced at the sight of the happiness of such a monastic family, St Peter Damian wrote to St Hugh of Cluny: "I beheld in your cloister a paradise watered by the four streams of grace that are the Holy Gospels, a garden of delights, in which grew roses and lilies, and the choicest perfumes embalmed the air, so that God can truly say of it: 'Behold, the smell of my son is as the smell of a fertile field which the Lord hath blessed.' For what indeed is Cluny but a fertile field of the Lord, in which, as from heavenly seed, there springs up a choir of monks, so many in number, yet but one in charity."

Our Holy Father St Benedict was well aware that the moral power of this *fortissimum genus*, this strong race of cenobites, sprang from their life in community, and hence he sought to unite all his sons by the closest bond of mutual affection. But charity must be shown in action, it must be manifested outwardly by word and deed, and strengthened by exercise; and for this exercise recreation is the very best time and opportunity.

St Benedict, in the 72nd chapter of his Rule, gives to his monks a truly beautiful exhortation on the preservation and exercise of this brotherly love; and in their commentary on this chapter, our Constitutions say that "it must penetrate into the very marrow of the monastic life, so that the love of Jesus Christ may reign, and that the monks may, before all else, fulfil that command which bids us love God with our whole heart, and our neighbour as ourself." They must, as our Holy Father says, "prefer one another in honour;" and therefore, at recreation, each will strive, without allowing it to be seen, to take the humblest place, and if the younger are naturally the first to do so, still no order of rank or precedence is maintained. This is a fundamental principle in a cheerful, unconstrained recreation. And so they press round their spiritual father, and all take part in the common conversation. Each of them may and ought to help in keeping it up, yet without forwardness, and without monopolising it. We admire perpetual silence and esteem those who bind themselves to it, but perhaps it may be easier never to speak than to do so only in the right way, and at the

right time. The government of the tongue, which is so important in the ascetic life, is more usefully learnt by moderation than by entire suppression of all speech. The secret of that wisdom which knows aright how to speak and how to keep silence, is only attained by years, even if it does not take a lifetime to learn how to control and how to exercise the tongue. Our Holy Father goes on to teach his sons that "they must bear the corporal and spiritual infirmities of others with the utmost patience." Each should treat the other with esteem, nay, with the reverence which faith inspires in us for souls beloved and redeemed by God. We should, consequently, respect the opinions of our brethren, and try never to talk them down or show contempt for their ideas.

But let us join the recreation for a few moments. We find the fathers sitting with the Abbot in a little summer-house. The day's post has just been distributed, periodicals and new books pass from hand to hand, and give rise to many comments, and afford matter for conversation. Then the Abbot has read aloud an interesting letter from a new foundation in a distant land, which calls forth much sympathy for those dear brethren, who, but a year ago, were themselves in the midst of this happy circle. They listen to the story of their privations, consult as to the means of helping them, and feel themselves urged to assist them by fervent prayer. Frequent and affectionate intercourse with the mother-house keeps the distant brethren closely united with it, and is their consolation and their joy when far re-

moved from it; and those remaining in the bosom of their religious home, hearing of the hard experiences of others who have been sent out, how they are deprived of all monastic observance in a strange land, feel doubly the undeserved and happy lot which has brought them where they are; though, while they thank God for their privileges, they are ready, should it be His will, to go forth also to the battle. Moreover, there are events, both grave and gay, of everyday life to narrate; liturgical and pastoral questions are discussed; the political questions of the day, or stirring events in the world, are touched on, and that in a way which would perhaps never enter into the heads of a diplomatist, or member of parliament; for here such events are regarded from the point of view of one who looks on at a distance and weighs these matters as they concern the interests of the Church and of her Lord.

So they are having a very good time together in that shady, vine-covered summer-house. The sunshine without is mirrored in the happy, free hearts within. And if, perchance, some one feels depressed, and in an uncomfortable temper, he must just struggle to keep it down, and sacrifice it to the common good, until peace in rich measure once more fills his heart.

If we go down that shady chestnut walk, we shall hear, while yet a long way off, the sound of cheery voices from an arbour in the corner; it is the students, the philosophers and disciples of St Thomas and St Alphonsus, the hope of the cloister, its future and its pride. The clerics (as we call them) are not, however,

discussing philosophy, for now in the recreation hour, grave learning is banished from that merry circle. They talk and tell all sorts of tales, they joke and chaff one another a little, but carefully, so as not to hurt any one's feelings. The Prefect reads them something out of the newspaper, for it is well to know what is going on outside, that so one may cling the closer to the peaceful shelter of the cloister, and learn to appreciate it the more. Then letters are read from some of the absent brethren who are pursuing their studies in the holy city, under the very eyes of the Vicar of Christ; they tell of the holy places which they have been to visit; of the splendid festivals which they have had the privilege of celebrating in this the true centre of all ecclesiastical life, and they thus arouse within the hearts of the hearers a deeper love for Holy Mother Church, and a more joyful pride in belonging to her.

And the novices? We ought to pay them a little visit. We find them with the Master of Novices in a distant part of the wood, where, on a broad grassy lawn, they are busily engaged in a game. It is a well-mixed band, of divers ages, ranks, and lands, but united under the same habit, and aiming at a common end. They, each and all, no matter of what spirit they were, are in process of new birth; forgetting and forsaking all that they had, knew, or could do, they are going through a slow course of spiritual fermentation, till they develop into children of the cloister. They have left the world, they have pushed back from the shore the boat that brought them to this peaceful home, or rather, they have

burnt their ships, and have abandoned themselves, with child-like confidence, to the guidance of their Superior, the worthy Novice-Master. He, as the representative of the Abbot, is now their teacher, their father, and their friend : he guides them gently but firmly, and leads them by the hand of the Holy Rule to the Abbot, and through him to Christ their Lord.

However, for the moment it is recreation, a joyous time, indeed, but, as we have already hinted, not without its spiritual lessons. Those who have hitherto been accustomed to follow their own wishes and inclinations, here give themselves up in child-like humility to community life. Priests long used to the guiding of souls, and to taking their own way, are here sharing in the merry games of the young students, and have become children again with them. Presently they are tired of their game, and sit down under the shade of the trees for a chat ; two novices bring a mighty basket of peas, and the whole party set to work shelling them, talking merrily the while.

Returning from our round, we come across yet another cheerful party, beneath a great, wide, spreading lime tree. These are the lay-brothers, who, after having washed up and cleared away all the pots and pans in the kitchen, are now enjoying their hour of rest and refreshment. They form so important a portion of the religious community, that later on we must pay them a visit.

When the weather is not favourable, the hour of recreation is spent by the fathers in the Calefactory,

and by the other sections of the community in their own common-rooms. The Calefactory is, as its name implies, a place where you can get warm, and its huge fireplace, surmounted by a great carved mantelpiece, bearing a stone image of St Benedict, is an important feature of the very pleasant, cheerful room, which is indeed not unlike an Oxford common-room.

And here it is well to remark that the guests do not, as a rule, share the recreation of the fathers. It is a special privilege reserved for old friends of the community, and only accorded as a rare favour to strangers. From time to time, however, the Abbot invites all, or some of his guests, to join the family circle. Priests and religious, however, form an exception, and are received as welcome guests at recreation. The reason the circle is thus strictly enclosed is owing to its intimate family nature, which would be marred by the continual presence of strangers.

We find the guests gathered round the Father Hosteller in a large parlour, where they are taking their coffee after dinner. After some time, an adjournment is made to the garden ; and here some separate from the rest, they have come to the abbey to make their retreat, and prefer to be alone. Others saunter about with the Hosteller, or with those of the fathers who happen to be their personal friends or relations. The guests, as a rule, come to the abbey to share in some degree, for a time, the life of the monks, and enjoy their spiritual privileges. But the extent to which they follow the monastic exercises

depends of course entirely on themselves. They are at liberty to dispose of their time as they choose.

At the same time, they are careful to disturb as little as possible the tranquillity and the discipline of the house. It has always been a difficulty to combine the exercise of extensive, almost patriarchal, hospitality, with the strict enclosure which it is the right and privilege of the monks to maintain. The problem has been solved in different ways. In some abbeys the guests are shut out entirely from the enclosure, and have their own quarters, where they live and eat, only seeing the religious in the church. Such is still the practice, for instance, at Monte Cassino. In our abbey, however, we have tried to consult the interests of our guests by admitting them, as far as is compatible with strict monastic discipline, to share the life of the community. Thus, though their rooms are in a different wing of the abbey, they are not cut off from the enclosure, and they take the principal meals of the day in the Frater. Our guests are grateful for the privilege. It is a source of spiritual refreshment for them to live for a few days in the peaceful atmosphere of the cloister, and there forget for a time the worries of business and the cares that beset their lives in the world. The very silence which prevails in the long corridors and cloisters is an anodyne for a jaded spirit. Again, the contrast between the whirl of luxury and pleasure they have been used to, and the stern yet cheerful aspect of monastic life, has an immense influence for good on the young and impressionable. They do not come to the monastery for more ease

and freedom, or for a luxurious table, or for the amusements of the world—there are hotels enough in which they may live at their ease, and our monasteries are poor—but they seek for something better, for spiritual refreshment and healing and strength for their souls.

To receive them is therefore a work of mercy, both spiritual and corporal, and amply justifies the custom, even if our Holy Rule did not prescribe on us the duty of hospitality.

The guests of the abbey are received at the cloister door, on their arrival, by the Hosteller or Guest-master, a father appointed by the Abbot to this office. He receives them with the greatest cordiality and kindness, and, indeed, with reverence, for in their persons he does homage to our Lord Jesus Christ. After the first greetings he leads them to the Church, there to pay a visit to the true Master of the house. After a short prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, they are shown to their room, which, though called a cell according to monastic parlance, has nothing prison-like about it, but is cheerful and bright, and furnished with sufficient though modest comfort. Here their wants are attended to with all charitable zeal, and they are made to feel themselves at once at home, although everything around them reminds them that they are in a well-ordered religious house. They are not offended, then, if they find on their table a little tablet setting forth the monastic order of the day, and requesting them kindly to observe certain rules which have for their object the preservation of monastic discipline. They are reminded, for instance,

that the monks are not allowed to speak to the guests without permission, except, of course, those who are specially charged with their entertainment.

As a rule, however they may choose to spend the day, our visitors like to assist at High Mass and at Vespers, which are sung so solemnly every day in the Abbey Church. So that even for them the Divine Office regulates, in a measure, the course of the day, and sheds its bright influence over their lives. Some of them may, indeed, have come to study the monastic life more closely, to see whether the attraction they feel towards it in the depths of their hearts be in truth a divine vocation, calling them to give up all things for Christ, and throw themselves into the stream of this peaceful and holy life. These are always most welcome, and the quiet retirement of a few days spent as guests of the abbey has often resulted in adding yet another member to the ever-growing ranks of the convent. Others find that they have been mistaken, that the life is not for them, but even so they go away the better for the decision, and for the glimpse of a life which they admire though they are not called to share it. The regulations for receiving visitors into the abbey are meant to exclude the mere superficial sightseer, who comes, as some one has remarked, in the same sort of spirit as that in which he would visit the Zoological Gardens. The monks do not want to be over-run with sightseers and tourists, and so they are obliged to insist on would-be guests bringing some letter of recommendation with them. But they are ever overjoyed to receive among them their friends and benefactors,

and indeed all who come for a serious purpose, and with a definite aim. Many are the hearts which have come to the cloister burdened with sorrow, care, or sin, and have returned into the world enlightened and refreshed. Lasting and strong are the bonds of mutual love and esteem which are often knit together here between a chance guest and the monastery, which has welcomed him with generous and Christian hospitality.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAY-BROTHERS . .

THE sound of the bell puts an end to the hour of recreation, and the innocent talk of the monks is suddenly broken off, even in the midst of a sentence. They rise and disperse, and after a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament, each goes about his business.

Even the lay-brothers, whom we saw amusing themselves under the lime-tree, have gone off to their workshops, or other places of occupation, and it would now be a good time to go round and pay them a visit.

The abbey is like a little town, it has every sort of occupation going on within its walls. Our Holy Father himself recommends that the enclosure should contain mills and workshops of all kinds, so that the enclosure may be the better observed, and it may not be necessary for the monks to go so much abroad, which, he remarks, is most inexpedient for their spiritual welfare. And so, the industries and trades

which are carried on in the workshops of the abbey by the energetic and devoted lay-brothers, are many and varied.

This was still more the case in the Middle Ages. The plans preserved of the Abbey of St Gall, for instance, seem to be those of a town. There are streets traversing it at right angles, and buildings of every kind and description. Besides the stately church and the regular monastic buildings (named *Claustrum*), we have the Abbot's lodgings, schools, both extern and intern, the hostelry or guest-house, the novitiate, the infirmary, the wash-house, workshops, barns, storehouses for fruit, granaries, mills, stables, besides gardens devoted to vegetables and medicinal herbs. The plan for this immense collection of buildings was drawn in the year 822, and Abbot Gozbert had it carried out and the whole work completed by A.D. 830.

We cannot hope to rival so magnificent a plan nowadays, but, nevertheless, our guests will find that the modern successors of these monks of old still strive to keep up their traditions. So let us visit the workshops of the abbey and see what is going on there. They are grouped, for the most part, round a quadrangle at the side of the main cloister. In those low buildings, on the right, we hear the merry strokes of the hammer on the anvil. It is a forge. A stalwart brother is in the act of fixing a new shoe on a great plough horse, which is standing patiently in the doorway. But he would be disappointed if we were to go away with the idea that his skill was confined to making horse-shoes. If we enter we

shall find his assistants fixing together a splendid grille of wrought iron, which they have made to enclose one of the side-chapels in the church. Close by are agricultural implements being put together, and a threshing machine which has just been skilfully repaired. The forge is a picturesque sight; the stalwart, bearded brothers, with their sleeves tucked up on their brawny arms, and their habits protected by large leather aprons, their faces, it must be owned, somewhat begrimed by soot, move about quickly in the red glow of the fire, and remind us at first, perhaps, of gnomes in a mountain cave. But we are soon told where we are by the large image of St Dunstan, or of St Eligius, patron saint of blacksmiths, who seems to look on with a complacent smile at the busy scene. No doubt, if the devil shows his nose within their precincts, the good brothers will know how to treat him, as St Dunstan did of old!

But our guests are even more delighted with the carpenters' and joiners' workshops, which adjoin the blacksmiths' forge. Here the picture of our Blessed Lord Himself working in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, under the guidance of St Joseph, reminds us at once of the sanctity of manual labour.

Some of the brothers are exceedingly expert in their trade, and we find here carvings which would not disgrace an art studio. They are fitting together the carved wood-work of a pulpit, and we are told that the splendid oak choir-stalls, with their lofty canopies and artistic carvings, were all made in these workshops, and from the designs of one of the fathers. The simplest articles for household use

are here designed and made with the same care and attention as the more important and artistic work, for the laws by which these workmen are guided are not those of ambition or of greed, but the supernatural principles, which teach them that the most humble work, if done for God, has the same reward as that which excites the admiration of men.

In another workshop we find an atelier of stained glass. The brothers are engaged in cutting it out and fixing it together with strips of molten lead. Their work is really artistic, and might well gain a medal at an exhibition, but such is not their ambition ; they are satisfied if but a ray of God's sunshine, passing through their coloured panes, fall on their bowed heads as they kneel before His altar. We now understand how it is the monks can afford to have such a wealth of stained glass and carved woodwork in Church and Chapter-house and Frater ; it is the produce of their own skill and labour.

In another part of this lay-brothers' quadrangle, we find all sorts of useful industries being carried on. Tailors and shoemakers ply their trades blithely, and by their skilful mending make the monastic clothing last twice as long as such things do in the world. A "God reward you, brother," is all the recompense they seek for their trouble, and a "May God bless it," is given over and above with the work.

Next comes the bookbinder, an indispensable aid to the librarian. That he thoroughly understands his business is shown by the ponderous tomes which he has just clothed in pigskin after the old monastic custom. They will last for many a year. His

masterpiece is a magnificently bound copy of the Holy Rule, and when we glance through its illuminated pages, we agree that they are worthy of the rich creamy vellum, stamped with elaborate designs in gold, in which he has bound them.

Nor is a printing-press wanting. Although this is an innovation in the cloister, still there is a very respectable tradition in favour of it, and we learn, perhaps with surprise, that the first printing-press ever set up in Italy was inaugurated in the Abbey of St Scholastica, at Subiaco, that sacred house which claims the proud title of Proto-Cœnobium—first of Monasteries.

Here is printed the little periodical which goes out into the world month by month, and does much to revive devotion to St Benedict, and spread the principles of the religious life among the faithful.

But we must hurry on. In the kitchen, in the bakehouse, in the cellar, we shall find busy hands employed. Outside, in the farm buildings, others will be found working in the stables or the barns, and others again in the garden and the fields. Everywhere work is going on, work hard and laborious, and yet the dark-robed figures have peaceful, happy faces, and though no chatting or laughing accompanies their unwearied work, the silence has nothing of moroseness or of gloom. And often it is broken by the sound of prayer. Nothing strikes the visitor more than to hear the lay-brothers reciting together the *Paters* and *Aves* of their simple Office, as they hoe potatoes in the garden, or cook the dinner in the kitchen. Wherever they are working together

the murmur of prayer is heard, and the hardest labour is accompanied by the music of the holy rosary.

Who and what, then, are these lay-brothers? It is a question often asked us by our guests. They see that they form an essential element in monastic life, that they are to the monastery what an industrious peaceful peasantry are to a well-ordered state, a necessary element of its well-being and prosperity. But it is not for reasons of material interest that the monastery welcomes those who come to fill the ranks of the lay-brethren. The lay-brothers are not merely unpaid labourers, they have a more sacred and more honourable position. Our Divine Saviour has not called men of rank or learning alone to follow Him in the way of the evangelical counsels, they are addressed to men of all classes and of all ranks. And the first monks, as we have already said, were not called to the priesthood, but were labourers who shared their time between prayer and manual work. St Benedict, our glorious Patriarch, himself declined, out of humility, the sacerdotal dignity. And when the needs of the Church demanded that the monks should be raised to the sacred orders, the lay element was never excluded from our monasteries. It must, indeed, ever remain as the basis of union between the cloister and the masses, and if the school of Christian perfection were ever to be limited to the educated or the well-born, a grievous wrong would be done to the poor of Christ.

And so, when the monastic Order reached its highest development and consolidated its organisa-

tion afresh, a division of labour was provided for, and in the separation of the choir-monks from the lay-brothers, the interests of both were consulted.

St John Guaibert in Italy, the Abbots of Cluny in France, and the Blessed Abbot William of Hirschau in Germany, were the first to introduce (in the eleventh century) the institute of lay-brothers, *Fratres Conversi*, or *barbati* (convert or bearded brethren), as they were called. To the last-named Abbot is due the merit of having given, for the first time, fitting regulations, rule, and habit, to these hard-working brethren, and to this he was impelled by the great concourse towards the cloister, in those days of strong faith, from all classes of the community, and especially from the higher ranks of life.

A crowd of noble men and women, from the highest families of the land, thronged to the cloister, begging to be received as "servants of the servants of God." In the true and devout conviction that to serve God is to reign, Count Adalbert left his castle to labour in Hirschau as a lay-brother, and Margrave Hermann of Baden became a swineherd at Cluny, just as St Carlomann, brother of King Pepin, had been a shepherd at Monte Cassino. In like manner, Roderick of Medina, a distinguished nobleman, begged leave to work at the cobbler's bench, in order to practice humility, and Frederick, Count of Verdun, brother of the Duke of Lorraine, dug the foundations of the abbey of St Vitus, and carried away the earth on his back. Count Adaham, the founder of Seckau, entered his new Monastery as a lay-brother, while his wife took the veil at Admont. Such as these were

the forerunners of our lay-brothers, and like them they fully realised the dignity of humble toil which He who deigned to be called "the carpenter's Son," has Himself sanctified.

The lay-brothers are, as it were, the hands and feet of the monastic body. They are true sons of St Benedict, loyal and beloved brothers of the choir-monks, bound by the same vows to fight the battle of holy perfection under the standard of the same Lord; these warriors of Christ have labour for their flag, obedience is their weapon, their shield humility. They are indeed to be envied in their modest seclusion, and I, for my part, look on them as the happiest of the inmates of the cloister, and the most secure of their eternal salvation. They have "left all things," and are truly poor in spirit, they wear rough and poor clothing, hard and ceaseless toil safeguards their chastity, they have no responsibility or charge to endanger the simplicity of their obedience, and therefore they may confidently expect the promised reward. "He that humbleth himself as a little child, the same shall be great in the kingdom of Heaven." There the humble lay-brother will lay before the throne of the King a rose of sweet perfume with five brilliant petals. The name of that rose is Labour, and its petals are Humility, Obedience, Diligence, Charity, and Prayer.

Humility is the first and most important of the virtues which should distinguish a lay-brother. It is, as it were, natural to him, for he looks upon himself, to use our holy Father St Benedict's words, as the lowest and the least of all, and as incapable of any

good work. Thus the saints delighted in abasing themselves and choosing the lowest and humblest occupations. And the recompense they looked for was not of this world, but God Himself, who is to His servants their "exceeding great reward." Some would rise by night to clean the shoes of their brethren, or do tasks even more repellant to nature, and these were men of the highest rank in the world. There are hundreds of such instances in the chronicles of our Order. And such acts of humility are, thank God, still being practised among us nowadays. I often see an old grey-bearded brother going slowly up the stairs, bent double beneath a heavy load of wood. His age dispenses him from such hard work, but he cannot be happy without it, and he has begged his Superiors so perpetually to permit him still to earn his bread by chopping the firewood and carrying the faggots, that they have been forced to yield. And if you could see the devotion and recollection with which, day by day, he blows the organ at Conventual Mass or Vespers, you would agree that his work is the best and purest form of prayer.

A special mark of humility, "that precious plant whose fruit is heaven," as St Basil says, is reverence for priests. It is peculiar to humble souls, who, being holy themselves, honour God's power and holiness in His consecrated servants. And this reverence is very marked among our lay-brothers. With what alacrity do they bend to kiss a priest's hand, with what zeal do they seek his blessing! A venerable lay-brother of our abbey was so accustomed to speak to a priest with uncovered head, that even on his deathbed,

when a priest came to see him, he would pull at his nightcap with trembling hands, until he succeeded in baring his head, and that in spite of all remonstrances. The devotion of the lay-brothers for all objects consecrated to God is striking, their greatest happiness is to be allowed to serve Holy Mass, they touch with the utmost reverence the sacred vestments, and humbly kiss the steps of the altar and the hand of the priest. Their faith carries them at those times to the foot of Mount Calvary, and draws down upon them the blessing of the Cross.

Monastic labour is further sanctified by Obedience. Our visitors are surprised to find so many trades carried on in the monastery. "How do we manage to get brothers skilled in all these different trades?" No doubt God provides for that, and sends us vocations according to our needs, but not all our brothers knew their trades before they entered. Some have learned them in the monastery. Not long ago we laid to rest a good lay-brother of eighty years of age. It would be difficult to say what had been his special work. He was at first in the kitchen, then he was gardener, he worked too with the carpenter, and understood basket-making, and when he was wanted, he could lend a hand at the baking. He was for many a long year a most faithful and careful Sacristan, and his childlike piety found great delight in this employment. He could not endure a speck of dust on the altar. Lastly, when his advancing years bent him beneath their weight, he took refuge in the warm kitchen, where he diligently employed himself in washing-up,

until the last plate dropped from his stiffened fingers.

Obedience sanctifies work as consecration does the chalice; it becomes at once quite another thing, for it belongs to the service of God. In the cloister we work for God, and for nothing else. And this is why the work succeeds so well, it is neither hurriedly nor carelessly done, it is not done for show or for gain. You are surprised to see what an unusually artistic character that carving or that iron-work have. The brother who designed them was a skilled workman, he knew his craft far better than the father who was placed over him. Nevertheless, he humbly set aside his own will and judgment, and allowed himself to be guided, and to learn a higher and a nobler style than that to which he had been used in the world, and so all unwittingly he gradually developed from a simple artisan into a clever artist.

Obedience demands at first many a sacrifice. How often would the lay-brother gladly hear another Mass in the morning, or prolong his thanksgiving after Holy Communion, or steal time from his work to pay a visit to the Most Holy? but obedience calls him to his workshop or to the stable or the garden, and he knows that the voice of his Superiors is for him the voice of God.

And so he labours with diligence and zeal, knowing that he is doing God's most holy will. It is not ill-regulated, feverish activity that deserves the name of Christian diligence, but that quiet orderly labour which knows how to employ every moment wisely to the glory of God. It is the result of that conscien-

tiousness with which a brother regards every piece of work, nay, every article entrusted to him. A faithful young brother, who died but lately, was tailor in our monastery. He knew every article of clothing in the whole house, how long each brother had worn his things, and how soon they would need renewing, who might best succeed to the use of a discarded garment, or how it could be utilised to the best account. And in like manner, the shoemaker knows the shape of every foot, and knows, too, exactly where everyone wears out his shoes, and how the soles can be made to last as long as possible. The Brother Porter, again, who has to give the signals for beginning work, or for any conventual exercise, is always to be found standing by the bell a few moments before the clock strikes, and the moment it begins his bell chimes in with it.

There comes to our mind as we write, a certain brother to whom was entrusted the care of the pigs. For many years he kept them with as much care as if they were the greatest treasures, three times a day he prepared their food and carried it to them, and these unattractive but useful animals knew him well as their friend and benefactor. It was touching to see with what cheerfulness and diligence he went about his wearisome and humiliating task, day after day, solely for a heavenly reward. How rich a one will it be! Gladly would we exchange with him.

The fourth quality of monastic labour is still more important, it is Charity. All the work of the monastery is done for the love of God and of the brethren, and therefore everyone is a work of charity. But

there are some special works of charitable zeal which we must not omit to mention here. The brothers in the kitchen have by no means the lightest task. Their work is hard and laborious, and in a sense unending. But it is peculiarly a work of charity. And if to feed the hungry is a work of mercy, so again is the care of the sick and infirm. We must not leave the abbey without paying a visit to the infirmary.

But for the present we must pass on to consider the fifth and last petal of that rose of labour which the pious brother offers to God. It is, as we have said, Prayer. Work must be accompanied with prayer, and itself turned into a prayer. Many a postulant who has knocked at the door of the monastery has been very much deceived, inasmuch as he expected to spend hours on his knees in the church and do nothing but pray to his heart's content. And now he has to work from morning till night! He thinks he might as well have stayed in the world. He has to learn that the intention makes all the difference, and that the secret of the cloister is the art of turning work into prayer.

The brothers will tell you so themselves. Ask that aged brother who, with tottering steps, has just come up from the cellar with a heavy basket of apples on his arm, ask him what he is praying about all day long. He will tell you that he must begin betimes or he would never get through, so many intentions has he to commend to God. He must pray for the Abbot and the monastery, for the novices and *alumni*, for the whole Order, for the Holy Church

and the Vicar of Christ, her head; his rosary must be offered for the holy souls in Purgatory, and his Office for the conversion of England.

Besides all these, he has so many particular intentions, that he has not time to give you an account of them all. And his eyes beam in his wrinkled old face, which is not unlike one of the apples he is carrying, as with a cheerful salutation he goes on his way, his lips moving as ever in his unwearied litany.

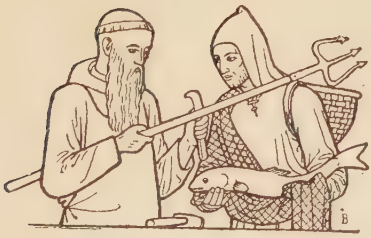
The science of the saints is not the special privilege of the cultured and the learned; on the contrary, God reveals His secrets to the little ones and the lowly. There are lay-brothers who are more learned in the things of God than many a priest who has made profound studies. The Blessed Gerard Majella, of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, is a striking example of this truth. A Jesuit lay-brother called Ximenes could speak of divine things in a way that astonished the most learned men, as the saintly Father da Ponte testified. He found two or three lines of a devout book sufficient for his daily meditation. He would then close the book, saying: "Now, let us chew the cud, an ox which does not chew the cud will never grow fat."

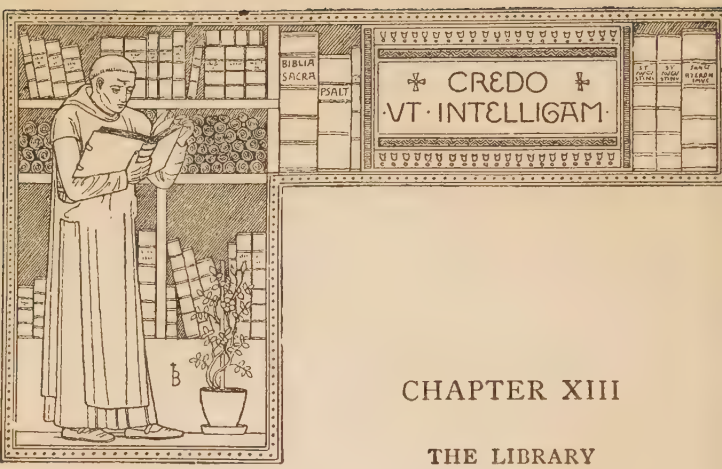
It must always be remembered that though there is much work in a monastery, it is not a factory; the religious family is not a limited company nor a co-operative association, though it may, perhaps, solve the social question better. Work is but a means to an end, that of the service of God, and the sanctification of the worker. The lay-brothers are not the menials of the abbey, the servants of the monks,

they are sons of the house, and brothers of the fathers. The fathers esteem them as such, and the Abbot counts them as a cherished portion of his flock. On certain great festivals they join the choir-monks at recreation, and thus the whole community, as one family, gathers round their much-loved father.

"What can be compared to a community rooted in charity?" asks St John Chrysostom, "it is like a strong city surrounded by walls."

But it is time to leave the lay-brothers and pay a visit to the library.





CHAPTER XIII

THE LIBRARY

A MONASTERY without a Library is as a fortress without an arsenal, says the old proverb. The Library is, therefore, one of the most important places in the abbey, and our guests would not willingly miss visiting it. But we must choose an hour in the afternoon to pay our visit there, for, like the Chapter-house, the Sacristy, and the Frater, the Library belongs to the places of regular observance, which are specially under the protection of the Holy Rule. It is here that, in undisturbed quiet and perfect silence, the greater part of the intellectual work of the monks is carried on, and no one is more unwilling to be disturbed than a scholar over his books.

We mount the broad staircase which leads us to the Library, situated in the very centre of the monastery. A massive oak door, artistically ornamented with wrought iron-work, admits us into

a large vaulted hall, which rises through two storeys of the abbey and the upper part of which communicates, by means of a gallery, with the corresponding floor of the monastery. Stained-glass windows shed a pleasant though somewhat subdued light over the whole room. All around rise neatly arranged walls of books, which reach up to the spring of the vaulted ceiling; the different divisions are made easily accessible by means of passages and step-ladders, and the serried ranks of mute orators readily admit their friends to hold confidential intercourse with them. In the centre of the hall, large green baize-covered tables are suggestive of study, and quiet prevails throughout this sanctuary of learning.

One library can never embrace all kinds of books —from the revelations of Almighty God, and the enlightened writings of inspired and God-fearing men, down to the most wretched manifestations of human folly, pride, and sensuality; nor would it be right that it should. Not even the modern literary Towers of Babel can do this; far less a monastic library which is intended to serve one common end. "A man is known by his books," it is said, and so we may learn, perchance, something of monastic life from an inspection of the library.

The monks of old ever regarded their books as instructors in holiness and in wisdom, and therefore in the most eminently practical light. "There are the masters," said Abbot Richard of Bury, "who without rod, or wrath, or reward, instruct us in the contemplation of heavenly things." "They are," writes the chronicler Hairulsus, "the true treasures

of the cloister, riches which fill the mind with heavenly sweetness, and by which that saying is fulfilled: 'Love learning, and thou wilt never love vice.'"

What, then, is the spirit which predominates in a monastic library? A glance at the massive crucifix which greets us as we enter will inform us. Like every other room, like the whole life and the industry of the cloister, the library also, and that in a very special way, is under the dominion of the Cross, *Liber scriptus intus et foris*, a book written within and without, as the inscription beneath it runs. A book that in flaming characters sets forth in every language of the world, in a way intelligible even to the unlearned, the great love of God to man. It tells them, "I am the Light of the world, I am the Truth, in Me are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge, and without Me all the learning of the world is but vanity and foolishness."

As the Cross is the centre point of this world's history, so, in like manner, should all its learning revolve around it and be subservient to it.

The philosophy of Paganism must lend its weapons for the defence of Christian truth, its arts must serve to enhance the triumph of the Crucified, discoveries in every department of science, the searching inquiry into the secret powers of Nature and their laws, the attentive ear bent to catch every pulsation of the human frame, every breath of its inner spirit—all these must be employed to confirm the truth of Divine Revelation.

To supply the monks with the means for their own

instruction and sanctification, that they in turn may become the teachers of youth and of the faithful; to provide them with weapons wherewith they may combat infidelity, superstition, and the mistakes of science; this, then, is the *raison d'être*, the great use of our monastic library. It must enable them to pursue, and spur them on to such study as, according to the words of the holy Abbot Trithemius, "may enrich the Church, preserve the faith, confound error, banish vice, teach morality, ripen virtue, praise God and rejoice the Angels, confirming the just and making them herald forth the glory of God." Learning undertaken in a spirit of faith, tends to holiness for its cultivation, exercises a man in true asceticism, in prayer and meditation, in self-abnegation, and in a continual tending towards perfection.

If this glance at the holy significance and practical aim of our library may serve to arouse the special interest of our guests, this will not be less enkindled by the consideration of its honourable past. The library of our forerunners, the monks of old, was the cradle of modern science; the history of our Order and of its greatest and its most saintly members is closely bound up with the development of European culture. Nowadays the savants of the modern world may look down contemptuously upon monastic bookishness, but there was a time when men of the world knew little or nothing of libraries, though one was to be found in every monastery. A town might exist without a collection of books, but in the monastery this spiritual food belongs to the very necessaries of life; discipline and piety would

soon die out if nourishment for the soul were wanting. The Church possessed the earliest Christian libraries, and she inherited the scientific wealth of the learned pagan world. The great Doctors of the Church, SS. Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, and Jerome, were possessed of both sacred and profane learning, and in the Churches of Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople, Tours, and other great centres of Christian life, collections of books were made from the earliest ages. This care, however, was, above all, entrusted to the Religious Orders.

It is related of Abbot Pachomius, who had under him eleven hundred monks in thirty monasteries, that each of them daily received a book to read. Our Holy Father, St Benedict, found this custom already established; but he nevertheless laid down, for the first time, fixed rules on this point, as on all others relating to monastic discipline. He appointed certain times for reading and study, as well public as private, both in Lent and at other seasons. Study, of course, became even more important in our Order, when its members were invested with the priestly dignity. The books intended for the spiritual life of the monks were, it is true, for the most part, sacred and ascetical works, the homilies and writings of the Fathers, the Acts of the Martyrs, or the Conferences and Institutions of Cassian, etc.; but, later on, profane works, especially the ancient Classics, found a refuge in the cloister. It was owing to Cassiodorus, the great Abbot of Vivarium, formerly Chancellor of Theodoric and Roman Consul (540), that the first type of a library on broader lines was presented to posterity.

He recommended to the monks that, besides the Holy Scriptures, they should study geography, "that they might be able to find out in what part of the world those places were situated of which mention is made in Holy Writ." He taught them also to study grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, etc., and to employ these sciences for the cultivation of their mental powers.

Again, the instruction of youth, which our Holy Father and Founder, St Benedict, wishes his monks to have very much at heart, requires study, and was a great cause of the increase of monastic libraries.

Together with the development of the monastery schools, as early as the eighth and ninth centuries, we find an active scientific life springing up in all the great abbeys of Italy, Gaul, Germany, and England; and very often, even in monasteries conspicuous for poverty, as, for instance, were those of St Bruno, a very rich library was got together. In some abbeys, as at Fleury and New Corbey, it was the custom for Novices, at their holy profession, to offer one or two books; abbeys, too, used often to exchange books with one another.

The Abbots were always eager to buy books. Abbot Bertram of Hildesheim, for instance, gave some valuable silver plate in exchange for manuscripts, St Benedict of Aniane set great store by the collection of books in his monasteries, and St Bede the Venerable, when dying, recommended to his disciples the preservation of their library, as being their greatest treasure. Although their splendid libraries were often destroyed by the ravages of war

and those of fire, yet the monks were never weary of beginning afresh. When in 830 the Huns devastated St Gall, the Abbot Engelbert succeeded in placing his much-prized books in safety in a neighbouring mountain. Less fortunate was Fulda, where the magnificent library, dating from the time of the Carlovingians, was utterly destroyed during the thirty years war. On the other hand, the Margrave Joachim of Brandenburg presented the Abbey of Corbey with the Hebrew and Arabic books that had been plundered during the wars with the Huns. In this latter abbey there were seventy-three manuscripts, dating from before the year 1200; and in St Gall there were numerous works of the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries.

These were, of course, all books written by hand, with jealous industry and unwearying perseverance, and each of them often represented the monastic labour of many years. But even after the invention of printing, the monasteries continued to be the chosen abodes of learning, collecting in their libraries all that human intellect had produced for the glory of God and the instruction of the faithful. Many monasteries set up printing presses, and many new inventions and improvements were due to the religious. The brothers of Rostock (1476) called printing "the teaching of all arts for the good of the Church," and themselves "Priests who preach, not only by word of mouth but by writing."

In the year 1475, Rome numbered twenty printing presses, for the most part founded by the clergy, whence, before the close of the century, 925 different

works had appeared. It is true that many far-seeing men, like the learned Abbot Trithemius, jealously opposed the neglect of the art of transcription, but it could no longer be kept up, and he himself became a diligent collector of books, for he used to say that "the neglect of study and the break down of discipline went ever hand in hand."

Then came a time when all the different works which had been destroyed by the devastation of war, and the suppression of monasteries, were once more to be renewed, and here again, amongst the foremost in the task, were the monasteries. It was at this period that communities were united into congregations, and by this means fresh life was infused into the Religious Orders. In Italy, in the fifteenth century, sprang up the congregation of St Justina; in Germany, that of Bursfeld, which comprised 150 monasteries, and developed a most rich, scientific life. Especially meritorious was the French congregation of St Maur (seventeenth century), some of the learned members of which (together with Jesuits, Augustinians, Franciscans, and Dominicans) undertook journeys of scientific discovery, and as Mabillon testifies, brought to light many lost treasures, which they knew how to value aright.*

It was not until the abolition of the Monasteries and the plundering of their property, at the time of

*These industrious Maurist Fathers collected 3000 precious manuscripts; the Library of St Germain at Paris consisted of 60,000 printed works, and 8000 manuscripts, a most remarkable number for that period. Benedictbeuern possessed 40,000, Tegernsee 60,000 volumes, and so on.

the Revolution, that the industry of the pious inmates came fully to light. Their libraries have supplied the main part of almost all the great public collections of books on the Continent.*

But why should I relate all this? Our visitors will perhaps say: "It is a well-known and uncontested fact that the old Religious Orders did much for learning and science, and afforded them a shelter during full a thousand years. But that state of things is at an end, and the monasteries of the present day, and their libraries, are no more than the merest shadow of their predecessors of the Middle Ages." †

It is true that furious storms have swept away what the zealous and learned labours of our fore-

* In Munich the books from some 150 monasteries were huddled together; in Berlin were united the libraries from the Abbeys of Magdeburg, Westphalia, the Rhenish provinces, and the Marck. To Carlsruhe was brought the far-famed library of Reichenau, and those of sixteen other religious houses, and it was in a similar way that Stuttgart, Breslau, Augsburg, Leipzig, Cologne, etc., laid the foundation of their municipal libraries. And the simple fact that more than a million volumes and 5500 manuscripts came from Catholic parts of Germany, whilst only 430,000 volumes and 1500 manuscripts came from Protestant localities, shows plainly enough the great preponderance of the old monastic collections.

† In those far-famed monasteries which were spared by the Revolution, there are still rich stores of literary treasures to be found. That of Admont possesses 80,000 volumes, 900 manuscripts, and 500 incunabula in its magnificent library. Again, in Austrian abbeys, such as Kremsmünster, Melk, Raigern, Seitenstetten, there are fully 60,000 volumes. St Peter's at Salzburg, and Einsiedeln in Switzerland, are also famous for their libraries.

runners had gathered together and that we must begin laboriously to construct our humbler monasteries out of the remains of their shattered and ruined abbeys; it is true that means are wanting which they found ready to hand, and that the times are very greatly changed. Fresh and unexplored regions of science have opened to the human intellect, and are being worked by thousands upon thousands, partly for money, partly for love of knowledge. The spirit of unbelief to a great extent permeates the science of the present day, but for all that we do not hesitate to engage in a war with the world in the domain of learning and science, in order to reconquer truth for the nations. The spirit of the fathers revives in the monastic library, the troop of printed and bound auxiliaries are ordered into line, the works of modern times are added to the legacy of days of yore, in order that we may represent in modern dress and in modern form that truth which is ever eternally and unchangeably the same, and may put its opponents to rout with their own weapons.

But it is high time to examine the library somewhat more in detail. It is true the books are meant to be studied rather than to be looked at. At the same time, it is always interesting to inspect a well-arranged library. We will, therefore, place ourselves in the hands of the Father Librarian, who has already come forward to greet us, and who will be proud to show us some of his treasures. He is like a shepherd "who knows his sheep by name"; there is not a single book among all these forty thousand volumes with which he is unacquainted. He could find them in

the dark, and he knows much more about them than their mere outsides. He is able to estimate the intellectual and the material value of each, and, though he has of course his favourites, he is no specialist, and can assist the reader in his search for the best materials, whatever may be his branch of study.

The Librarian explains to us that his books consist principally of theological and ecclesiastical works. These occupy the whole of the lower part of the library. But science, literature, art, and the classics of all ages and all languages are not neglected—the upper portion of the library is devoted to them. The monk knows that he must keep in touch with the times if he is to be of any use in them; and that without the profane sciences his theological and ecclesiastical studies would be stunted and incomplete. He, therefore, gathers together the cream of all the world's wisdom, and places it in his library at the foot of the crucifix.

The Library is arranged according to subjects, each subject having a separate compartment. Some are, of course, larger than others, but each compartment makes, as it were, a little library of its own. Some are cut off from the main library by walls of book-cases, and in the alcoves thus formed are tables and desks for the use of students. Some, we notice, are occupied even now. We see hooded figures walled in, as it were, by the heaps of books and papers piled up around them, working silently and busily, and yet with deliberation, as all good students, and especially Benedictines, always do work. We

remember, as we pass them, the well-known French proverbs, "as learned as a Benedictine," and "Benedictine industry." Thoroughness is the special characteristic of the Benedictine school, a thoroughness which springs from a high aim and conscientious unsparing labour.

The Librarian explains to us the system of cards by which this large collection of books is catalogued. In every book we find a card with the title and number of the work, and if any one wishes to take out a book, he writes his name on the card, and leaves it in the vacant place left by the book. Every evening these cards are collected by the Librarian, or one of his assistants, and placed in alphabetical order in a receptacle, in such a way that the student can see at a glance which books are out and where they are. These cards correspond with other cards which form the catalogue, and which are kept in alphabetical order in a series of drawers. Order is of importance everywhere, but most of all in a library, and a library without a good catalogue loses more than half its value.

We notice the first compartment is devoted, as is only fitting, to Holy Scripture, and the commentaries on Holy Scripture. And not only do we find Catholic commentators like the famous Cornelius à Lapide and Maldonatus, not to mention the modern Jesuit school of exegesis, but Protestant writers are also well represented, and we notice the works of Lightfoot, Westcott, Godet, Delitzch, and their like, though these are kept in a separate part from the Catholic commentaries. But the most renowned exponents of Holy Writ must always be the Fathers

and Doctors of the Church, and a very large portion of our library is devoted to their works. And here the Librarian is careful to point out, with a little innocent pride, the splendid works of the Benedictines of the congregation of St Maur. Their editions of the Fathers have never been surpassed, and indeed, such a gigantic task could only have been performed by a large body of devoted workers under the guidance of obedience, and at a period when monasteries were numerous and rich. Nowadays it would be quite impossible to undertake it without help from Government.

Next come the compartments devoted to Dogmatic Theology, Moral Theology, and Canon Law. Another very important division is that of Ascetic Theology, and here the Benedictine element naturally predominates, though by no means exclusively so. Still, an Order which has produced a St Gertrude, a St Bernard, and a Blosius, has naturally spiritual traditions of its own, and though less known than some others, the school of Benedictine ascetic theology has a beauty all its own. As books of spiritual reading are constantly wanted in a monastery, there is another collection of such works, we are told, always ready to hand in the calefactory, or recreation-room.

Liturgy forms another division peculiarly dear to Benedictines, who devote their lives to the liturgical worship of God. Here we find not only the treasures of the Western Church, the ancient sacramentaries, the mediæval rites of Sarum, and the like, breviaries and missals of all ages, countries, and rites, but also a good collection of Eastern liturgical works. The

commentators fill many and many a shelf; from Durandus to Dom Guéranger they range, and not the least valuable, here again, are the works of Benedictine writers. History is too vast a field for one compartment; it has to undergo many a sub-division, and even then it is constantly overflowing its borders. But it is unnecessary to enumerate them, or to speak of hagiology with the mighty tomes of the Bollandists as its solid foundation, of biography, the history of the Religious Orders of the Church, of the Benedictine Order, of special dioceses and cities, of kingdoms and nations—all and each, and many beside, have each their own place and their own division in our Library. And if the visitor cares to mount to the galleries, he will find an even more bewildering series of subjects: philosophy, mathematics, music, art, natural science, Greek and Latin classics, poetry, literature, etc. But we cannot omit mentioning one compartment specially interesting and significant here, and that is the division of the Library devoted to the various editions of the Holy Rule, and to commentaries upon it, most varied in date, language, and origin.

Before we bid the Librarian good-bye, we must accompany him to a smaller room, leading out of the great Library, which is devoted to a treasured store of manuscripts. This room is modelled after the *Scriptorium*, or writing-room, of the monks of old, and here we find, in carefully-closed cupboards, or in glass cases, some of the exquisitely illuminated works which the world owes to the diligent fingers of our predecessors. For the most part they are psalters,

missals, or breviaries of different periods, and there is a magnificent set of huge antiphonaries, illuminated with marvellous skill, which are still used in the choir on great festivals. But these are after all but specimens, a few spars from the mighty wreck, bought from the Jews perhaps, and given by benefactors back to the monastery, where some of them were, perhaps, originally written. Our old collection, formerly so rich, has long since been destroyed, or has found its way into some public or royal library.

The Scriptorium was the workshop whence the mediæval collections of books were supplied, and there in the early days of monasticism many a diligent hand was unweariedly occupied in multiplying copies of the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the fathers, as well as the works of pagan poets and philosophers. The most renowned monasteries were precisely those that produced the most beautifully written manuscripts. It was a test of the degree of learning and discipline to which they had attained.

Over the entrance to the Scriptorium of the famous Abbey of Fulda, the shrine of the glorious Apostle St Boniface, were to be read the following lines :—

"*He only sitteth here who writes the maxims of the law,*
Or who, with pious mind, transcribes what saints have writ before.
Beware, lest thou by frivolous word the holy silence stir,
Lest not alone the loosened tongue, but pen ana hand should err,
With prudent diligence he writes, that faultless be his tome,
While rapidly along the lines his nimble fingers roam,
For surely 'tis a glorious task such holy books to write,
And surely shall the faithful scribe receive a guerdon bright."

In this Scriptorium, at the time of the Holy Abbot Sturmius, about three hundred monks were engaged, by turns, in copying. The manuscripts of the Abbeys of Lorsch, of Hersfeld, of St Albans, of Glastonbury, were famous far and wide. At Bobbio and Pomposa were very valuable collections. The Blessed Rabanus Maurus transcribed with his own hand both his own works and those of others. The demand for St Bede's works was so great that the Scribes at Jarrow and Monk's Wearmouth could not satisfy them in spite of their unwearied diligence. The monk Sintram of St Gall, Abbot Reginbert of Reichenau, and many others were famous for their beautiful writing, and connoisseurs can still detect, by peculiarities in the shape of certain letters, manuscripts which owe their origin to the famous Scriptorium of St Alban's Abbey and the school of Matthew Paris. At Mondsee, in Bavaria, a monk named Jacob is said to have transcribed so many books, that six horses could scarcely carry them. This seems at first hardly credible, but when we hear that Conrad, the philosopher of Scheyern Abbey, wrote fifty great folios, and adorned them with elaborate illuminations, and that the Camaldolese monk, Maurus, copied more than a thousand MSS. during his monastic life of fifty-five years, and consider the immense weight of these great volumes, bound often in thick oak boards, clamped and clasped with heavy metal ornaments, the statement becomes more comprehensible. Abbot Frederick of Hirschau was often to be seen sitting among his monks in the Scriptorium, the most diligent worker of them all, and St Bede himself tells

us that he was his own secretary, and transcribed with his own hand his multitudinous writings. Nuns, too, laboured in the Scriptorium, and several of them, like Dimudis of Wessobrun, and Leukardis of Mallersdorf, have left us the most beautiful books.

Thus were the writings of Christian and of pagan antiquity preserved for us by the unwearied labours of the monks. And still in the cloisters of ancient abbeys now desecrated and abandoned, as, for instance, those of Durham and Gloucester, can we trace the carrels of the patient copyists, who, though frost and snow often stiffened their aching fingers, worked on untiringly for the benefit of all future ages.

It is needless to dwell on the exquisite illuminations with which they loved to decorate their work. Too many specimens remain, and we can see them in many a museum and public library. Suffice it to say, that their extraordinary perfection is still the admiration and the despair of the student. The books usually concluded with a request that the reader would say a prayer for the transcriber, or with the dedication of the work to God and His saints. Very often the time taken to transcribe the work is added, and "the great pains" of the copyist are alluded to. The monk Eadbert makes his moan in the following lines:—

"*They who know not how to write, little of the labour ken;*
Not three fingers only work, 'tis the whole man drives the pen."

Very frequently poverty was added to the other difficulties, and the most necessary materials were not

forthcoming. The monks had themselves to prepare their skins of parchment and vellum, but sometimes they were driven, like the first monks of St Blaise, to write their books on birch-bark. For binding, the skins of deer or chamois were often used, as well as the tough hide of the pig, wild or domestic, and we are told that Charlemagne frequently sent the skins of animals he had killed in the chase to monasteries for this purpose.

At all times the greatest store has been set upon this meritorious work of transcription, and Cassiodorus may be said to sum up the opinion of his own and of subsequent ages, when he praises it as "a good purpose and praiseworthy industry, since thereby monks preach with their hands, open their lips by means of their fingers, labour for the salvation of mankind without quitting their solitude, and with reed and ink defeat the wiles of the devil." In the catalogue of the library of Muri, it is said, "Books should be continually copied, multiplied, corrected, ornamented, and commented on, for the life of spiritual men without books is nothing worth." And the Venerable Abbot Trithemius promises "the worthy copyist as reward the glory of heaven, for they who instruct many in justice, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

While the Father Librarian is thus talking to us of the works of his monastic predecessors, he turns over the pages of his manuscripts with reverent care, so that we may admire these proofs of the glories of the past. And now he closes his cases securely, and replaces all in their proper places. Even the love and

care with which he treats his foster-children is a heritage from his forefathers. Books were cherished, guarded, and preserved as the most prized possessions of a monastery. The most minute rules and regulations were laid down for their preservation. Abbot Richard of Bury has left a detailed instruction on this subject, which commences with the monition that "we serve God not only by carefully providing new books, but also by taking heed how we handle and preserve those of which we make use." And still in the monastery it is a heinous fault to maltreat or disfigure a book, and rules are laid down which forbid scribbling on the margins, and other malpractices of the kind. As for our Librarian, we can see there is no need to impress the lesson upon him, for it is very evident with what affection and care he watches over his books, and the whole Library is kept in such beautiful order that it is a pleasure to see it. Nor is this a small matter in a Library which is in such constant use, and where books have to be continually re-arranged to make room for fresh arrivals. The Librarian has also enough to do to satisfy the demands of his brethren for new books on the different branches of study in which they may be interested. Nowadays it is not a matter of labour but of money, and though the monastery gives all it can possibly spare to the increase and improvement of the library, still the budget is none too large, and needs careful financing. Again, to complete the missing volumes of a series, or to acquire rare old books in the cheapest market, needs knowledge, trouble, and circumspection on the part of the librarian, as well as

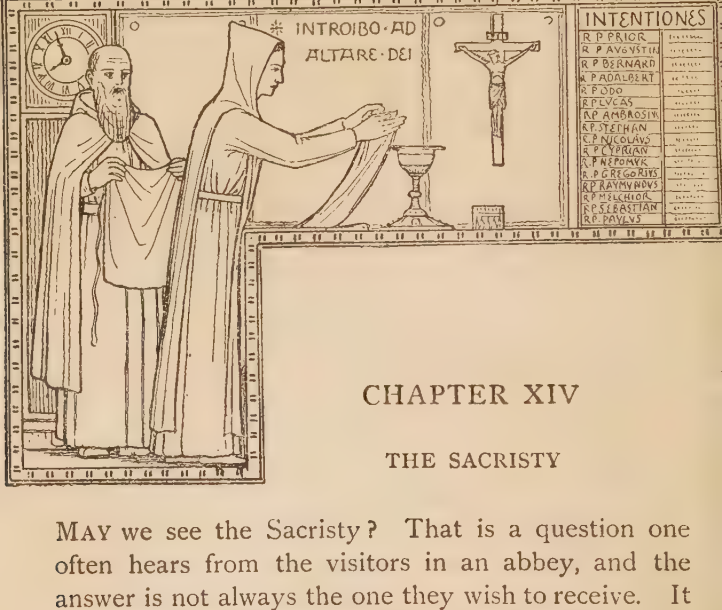
money. He has also to keep in the swim of modern publications, and see that he procures what is really valuable, excluding what is superficial and useless. The catalogues of second-hand booksellers are his daily study, for he is always on the look-out for a bargain, and knows to a nicety what is the market price of the works for which he is searching. So he is always ready to pounce down like a bird of prey on any dainty morsel that may be offered at a low price. But if our library had depended solely on purchases, it would be stripped of half its riches. It is, on the contrary, indebted for the greater part of its treasures to benefactors who have given or left either valuable works or the whole contents of their libraries to the Abbey. Many a priest or student in the world knows of no better way of securing a good home for his treasured books than of leaving them to a monastery. He feels that there, at least, they will be preserved with jealous care, and will be valued as they deserve. Thus our Library has grown to its present proportions from a very humble beginning and at a very moderate cost. And there are no benefactors to whom the sons of St Benedict are more grateful, or for whom they pray more earnestly, than those who have given them their books.

It is clear that the office of Librarian is not an easy one to fill, requiring, as it does, not only industry, prudence, and charity, but also extensive knowledge, and so it is not to be wondered at if the annual renewal of offices finds the same trusty shoulders bearing the burden year after year. As the monks

cannot so easily travel about to consult public libraries, as can secular students, it is obvious that they are all the more dependent on their domestic collection of books, and that the choice of these books is all the more important and responsible a task.

The Librarian has yet another room to show us —that of the periodicals. Here we find, ranged on desks and tables, a large collection of the current periodical literature of most European countries. These are for the most part exchanges sent in return for the monthly periodical issued from the Abbey press. The monks are thus kept in touch with the thought of the day, and with the latest discoveries in history, science, and art. In this room, too, we find a series of locked cupboards, called by the ominous name of "Hell," which contain books that for one reason or another it is not advisable to leave about for chance perusal. They are mostly works written against our holy faith, which it may be necessary for its apologists to consult, with a view to their refutation. Books against good morals are also kept in this forbidden region, although such works are, as a rule, committed to the flames, unless there are sufficient reasons for keeping them. Bad books are powerful instruments in the devil's hands, and it is to be wished that in all Christian homes there were such places of confinement for these transgressors. It is obviously a duty to keep them out of the hands of young people and others who have no need to consult them, and the neglect of such precautions entails every day irreparable harm

to souls. Good books, on the other hand, are the truest of friends, teachers, and comforters. St Chrysostom desires that with regard to reading, monks should be nourished with the best food, "that there should not be set before them the sodden flesh of unclean beasts, but rather the Word of God, which is sweeter than honey in the honeycomb." "Nourish thyself with spiritual reading," exclaims St Ambrose, "and partake of it so that it may bring thee to eternal life, feed on it daily that thou mayest not hunger, but so be filled and satiated therewith as to be enabled to feed others also with heavenly words."



CHAPTER XIV

THE SACRISTY

MAY we see the Sacristy? That is a question one often hears from the visitors in an abbey, and the answer is not always the one they wish to receive. It often seems as if the guide, hitherto so ready to oblige, had not heard the inquiry, or that there is no time left; it is missed over amongst so many other things. And even when, at some quiet hour of the day, the visitors, in accordance with their desire, are admitted into the Sacristy, the most that they are shown is some object of value, a chalice, or a monstrance, and then they are quietly shown out again.

And there is reason in this, for the Sacristy is no museum; it belongs to the places in which regular discipline is observed, and where silence has to be kept; moreover, at the times before and after the Divine service, it is a sacred place. All our visitors

have some idea of what a Sacristy is, for they must all have seen the Sacristy of some church or other, which either business or curiosity has caused them to visit. They know that it is a place where priests vest and unvest, where the vestments and the vessels of the altar are kept; that it is a place where persons are received who have any particular business with the priests, and that, under certain circumstances, confessions (*e.g.*, of deaf persons) are heard there, and so on. A Sacristy is a very necessary place in every large church, and doubtless they have existed from the earliest times, if perhaps in primitive Christian churches they were called by different names.

This apartment was often situated in the apse, sometimes behind or at the side of the High Altar, but always close to it. Its size and position varied considerably. In later times the Sacristy has usually been made an annex to the church, is sometimes large and roomy, sometimes small and narrow, and equally varied in the style of its furniture and arrangements, just as are the churches themselves. The Sacristies of cathedrals and monastic churches in the Middle Ages were large and well kept; and even in these days, with the revival of the liturgical services, much store is set by a well-provided, neat and carefully-kept Sacristy.

The Sacristy is the arsenal of the church, its store-house, its treasury; but, more than all, it is the place in which the priests assemble, where they prepare for the Divine service, and whence they start for the church; it is a place of recollection and of prayer. If

it does not, strictly speaking, form a part of the consecrated church, still, it is an honourable place, kept reverently closed from all outsiders, so that it may not be desecrated by worldly talk, and it is only as an exception that seculars are admitted there.

The Sacristy of the Abbey Church has, of course, the same uses as that of any other church, but its significance with regard to the ecclesiastical life is greater, owing to the larger number of the priests, and the more numerous functions. It may, therefore, be interesting to the guests if to-day, for once in a while, they follow their guide to pay the Sacristy a passing visit. We may, perhaps, learn in so doing much that we did not know, and which may help to make the solemn worship of Almighty God more intelligible to us and even dearer than before.

The Sacristy of the monastery is placed beyond the transept of the church, and opens out of the cloister, close to the great door by which the monks habitually enter the church. It is, therefore, situated within the enclosure. This is not everywhere the case; there are monasteries in which the Sacristy is either entirely, or at least partially, outside the strict enclosure, so that the faithful may freely enter it on parochial or spiritual business; but in our abbey we prefer to keep to the old custom.

The lofty door, with the large marble holy water stoup beside it, indicates at once the sacred purpose for which the room is destined, for at its side hang church notices and mortuary bills, etc. It is a beautiful practice on entering the Sacristy, in which

we are about to prepare for the Divine service, to call to mind the faithful departed. As the faithful pass through the churchyard to the church, so do we here pass by these memorial papers, which serve to remind us to think of the souls of our departed brethren and sisters. Members of other Religious Orders, with whom we have a union of prayers, the relations, friends, and benefactors of the monks, are all thus commended to our prayers. By the side of the door there hangs a tablet, on which we find the names of the fathers and the times and order of the Masses for the following day; for in the monastery all must be regulated in an orderly manner, and especially all that concerns the worship of God. It is the duty of the Sacrist to see that each Father goes at the appointed time to offer the Holy Sacrifice at the altar indicated for him.

Let us now enter the vaulted and roomy Sacristy. It is a spacious and dignified apartment, rivalling the Frater in size, with Gothic windows, high up in the walls, so as to leave ample space for the series of presses in oak and walnut-wood, which completely cover its sides.

The first thing that strikes us on entering is a large metal crucifix. This is placed between two tall candlesticks upon the broad and massive vestment-table, which runs along the whole of one side of the Sacristy. In early Christian times, it was the custom for the Bishop to be vested before an altar in the Sacristy, though nowadays our Prelates usually vest at the throne before the solemn Pontifical ceremonies, and the vestments are laid out upon the High Altar.

The altar represents Christ, and thus it is from Him that the sacerdotal vestments are transferred to His representative. If there is no altar in the Sacristy, it is appointed by the rubrics that at least a crucifix should be placed over the vestment-table, to which the priests are to make an inclination on leaving and returning to the Sacristy. This custom, of having the crucifix before him when vesting for the Holy Sacrifice of the Cross, is most suggestive of solemn reflections to the priest, which are enhanced by the symbolism of the vestments bearing testimony, as they do, to the Passion of our Lord—the garment in which He was mocked, the chains, the Cross, etc.

The lofty windows of stained-glass cast bright-coloured beams across the inlaid parquet floor. The walls all round are lined with the massive oaken presses, of which we have spoken, before which rises a broad wooden step; the iron clamps and artistically-wrought locks serve alike for their ornamentation and security. A pleasant warmth and a faint perfume of wax and of incense pervade the vast room, whilst the almost solemn stillness compels us to speak in a whisper.

What next attracts the attention of the visitor is the large basin of dark marble in one corner of the room, to which another simpler one corresponds on the opposite side. A metal tap turns the water on and off, and near at hand are white towels hung over a roller. The custom of washing the hands before any act of religious worship is very ancient, and to be found amongst both Jews and Pagans. In order

that the former might wash both hands and feet before entering the inner court of the temple, Solomon had an immense basin cast which was called "the sea of brass," and this was placed just outside the entrance. Again, in early Christian times, at least, in the East, a large receptacle for water was to be found at the entrance of the Church, so that the people might make use of it for the purpose of washing. We find in this an outward expression of the desire for purity of heart, and of the need for expiation. The hands are washed as being the instruments of guilt, with the earnest petition that God would vouchsafe to purify the whole of the inner man. The priest performs this liturgical act of washing his hands before all the most solemn religious rites, and especially before and after Holy Mass ;—before it, to wash away the dust of the world, and again afterwards, before the hands which have touched the Most Holy are once more employed in worldly business. The other basin is used in the same way by those who assist or serve at the Altar.

In the embrasures of the windows, or in some other retired spot, we find prayer-desks arranged for the priest's devotions before and after the Holy Sacrifice, over which hang cards with the appointed prayers. The time of thanksgiving after Holy Mass is one of the most important in the religious life of the priest; it is then that he must pluck the fruits of the Sacrifice, and gain the needful strength for his whole life and work. And therefore he seeks out the quietest spot he can find, where he may be alone

with God. Some return to the church, others withdraw to their cell; but many find their chosen place of devotion here, where they have just laid aside the sacred vestments; and this is again a further reason why the Sacristy is a spot specially consecrated to God.

Against the inner doors and in other suitable places, notices are hung up giving all desirable information to the officiating priests. On one we find in illuminated letters the name of the Sovereign Pontiff, and that of the Bishop of the diocese, both of which occur in the Holy Mass; on a framed board are put up the different intentions for which the various fathers have to say their mass. Close at hand hangs the *Directorium*, which gives full particulars as to the Choir Office of the monastery, and the Mass of the day, which is always in close connection with it. In another place, we find notices of certain feasts and anniversaries, such as the dedications of the various altars, special ordinances of the Bishop of the diocese or of the Abbot, and the Masses which have been founded by benefactors and which have to be celebrated in perpetuity, and again a form of instructions and prayers for those who serve Mass. This all supplies needful decoration, tends to order, and preserves silence. Several devout pictures hang between the windows, and legends from Holy Scripture are painted along the frieze above the presses, all of which help to kindle devotion, and to inculcate recollection.

But our guests are certainly longing to see those mysterious high cupboards opened, and they shall have their desire. But first, we must make the

acquaintance of the Father Sacrist, and inquire into his office and its duties. These are important and manifold. Before all else, the Sacrist is the guardian of the Tabernacle and of the perpetual lamp ; he keeps the keys of the Sanctuary, and takes care that the faithful are duly provided with the Bread of Life. He has to arrange and prepare everything appertaining to the Holy Sacrifice. There must be fresh altar breads, and pure wine for the many Masses that are said each day ; the necessary vestments, clean altar linen, chalices, candles, books, all must be seen to and prepared in time. It is his place to appoint the turn of each priest to celebrate and to indicate the altar. In a well-ordered Sacristy, in spite of the multifarious requirements, all goes on smoothly and quietly, without waste of either time or words ; and in this especially is to be seen the masterly guidance of a good Sacrist. Then there is the holy water to be blessed ; and oil, wax, incense, ashes and salt, and a host of other necessary articles to be provided for the more important liturgical ceremonies. He is responsible for all these things being properly made and taken care of, and repaired when necessary, and must see that those which have been used for sacred purposes are not thrown away when worn out ; but carefully burnt, and their remains brought to the appointed place, the *Sacrarium.*

We should never come to an end were we to enumerate all the official duties and cares of the Sacrist, but this much may suffice to inspire our guests with all due respect for him, and if we now greet him with all the more deference and

friendliness, he will be also the more willing to devote to us some of his precious time. For the rest, we can see clearly that one person could never suffice for all these varied occupations, and it is the will of our Holy Father, St Benedict, that none of his sons should ever be over-burdened; hence the requisite assistance is always granted him. The Sacrist himself (who, moreover, is often busily engaged in the confessional) can only superintend and bear the responsibility. The greater part of the actual work and arrangements fall to the share of two or three of our worthy lay-brothers, who, in their turn, as we shall presently see, are aided by the clerics and the novices.

And now the presses are being opened. In the upper part hang in long rows a fine array of copes, a vestment that owes its origin to the Roman mantle, and which was in early times (as the hood betrays) the special monastic vestment worn as choir mantle on festivals. The cope is worn in our abbeys at solemn vespers and at other great ceremonies, not only by the celebrant, but by the cantors and the assistant priests, and sometimes by all the monks in choir. Consequently, there must be a good share of copes in all the liturgical colours, and of various degrees of richness, from the simple white choir mantle to the elaborately embroidered and beautiful copes worn by the Abbot or the celebrant on great festivals. Lower down we find presses full of chasubles. If each little parish sacristy must possess a choice of these, how many must be required here! To know them all and to arrange accordingly, needs a practised eye,

and these, too, are only such as are used for Low Mass. The more costly ones are carefully laid away in wide drawers, and amongst them are many beautiful vestments, which have been presented for first masses or for feasts, and they, for the most part, are the artistic work of nuns. They are all of mediæval form. Originally the vestment for mass, as its name of chasuble (*casula*, or small house) implies, veiled the whole figure of the priest, and symbolised the all-concealing, sheltering mantle of charity. Later on, for convenience sake, a portion of the sides were cut away, and by degrees the vestment was diminished in size, until at length only two stiff pieces remained to cover the priest before and behind. Now, in many places, the more ancient shapes have been again introduced, and in this, as in all else that belongs to the artistic arrangements for the Divine service, the Benedictine Order must take the lead. There is no limitation by ecclesiastical rubric as to the shape, but only as to the selection of materials, amongst which what is very common is prohibited; but the pious reverence, alike of priest and people, would suggest that all ornaments employed in the service of God, and, above all, such as are consecrated to Him, should be both rich, artistic, and in good taste.

Then for every chasuble and dalmatic, there must be a stole and maniple to match, both in colour and material; and as the former, besides being required for Mass, are worn for many other priestly offices, a great number of them are required of the most varied make and design. But the Father Sacrist keeps the most precious vestments of all shut up in that central

press, which he is opening for us to-day, as a mark of particular favour, and we may guess, from his beaming countenance, that something quite out of the common line awaits us here. And, indeed, such a brilliant show of colour and sparkling gems shine forth from out that dusky prison, as is rarely to be seen. There is carefully laid away a magnificent set of pontifical vestments of cloth of gold, with rich embroidery, and this the zealous Father has got together in the course of years, with the help of self-sacrificing friends and benefactors.

When, on the greatest festivals of the year, the Abbot, in all the pomp and dignity of a prelate, surrounded by a crowd of assistant priests, offers up the Holy Sacrifice, it is but fitting that he should be vested in accordance with his exalted station, and it is then that all these glorious vestments, that the Sacrist is spreading out so busily on the vestment-table, find their proper use. They are all duly laid out upon the altar, and borne thence by a row of acolytes to the Abbot, who, seated on his throne, is there vested by the assistants. Then, too, they use that costly silver ewer and basin to pour water over his fingers, and they vest him in that beautiful alb, richly embroidered in silk and gold. Over this come the under-vestments of thin silk, the dalmatic and tunicle, tokens of the lower ecclesiastical orders, and then they place upon him the ample Gothic chasuble. In his hands, on which are already costly gloves, they place the silver crosier, and finally, they put on his head the mitre, sparkling with jewels and adorned with delicately embroidered figures. Our

visitors find these things especially interesting, and are never weary of admiring the embroidery on the precious mitre, which is a present from one of our communities of nuns.

But we must be going on, or we shall not have time to see everything. Yonder are two great cupboards full of albs, the white wedding-garment, clad in which the priest goes up to the altar. Close by are endless small drawers, each marked with a priest's name, for every father requires a supply of altar linen for the Holy Sacrifice, the corporal, the mundatory, the lavabo, or finger-cloth, and the amice, which signifies the helmet of salvation, with which he covers his head. It is again a part of the Sacrist's business to see that all the consecrated altar-linen is fresh and clean; and of this there is required a large stock, as so many strange priests come to celebrate in the Abbey Church, and each must be supplied with clean linen.

When we ask the Father Sacrist where he has got all his riches from, he informs us with a contented smile, that he has inexhaustible sources whence what is wanting or worn out can always be replaced. There are so many of the faithful who make the adornment of the altar and the becoming celebration of the Holy Sacrifice their chief concern. This work of loving devotion belongs by right to Christian women, and there are to be found, thank God, at least in most of the larger towns, many good women and young girls who, associated together in societies for church work, make it their business to provide a due supply of altar

linen and vestments, at least, for all the poorer churches.

In this business, as in every other, commercial industry endeavours to get a monopoly. But the very name of factory sounds unsuitable in connection with such work. There are, we know, good Catholic manufacturers, whose work-women fully realise the holy purpose for which they are working, and with the ever-increasing number of churches it may be really necessary to employ commercial labour, but still artistic church work should ever find its true home first of all in the cloister, and secondarily amongst pious Christian women who work in a prayerful spirit, offering all they do to the glory of God.

But the Father Sacrist is now opening a great iron safe, secured with many locks and bolts, the sparkling contents of which attract us towards it. And truly precious in every respect are these vessels of the altar, chalices, pyxes, and monstrances, the treasure of the church, which, in accordance with their high destiny, are all of costly material, and yet more costly workmanship. Our visitors can look at them as much as they like, but no lay person can be permitted to touch them, for they have been consecrated to the service of God. The Sacrist, however, willingly shows them, each in turn, pointing out the delicate chasing, the enamels and filagree work, and the precious gems with which they are set. There are chalices of various style and workmanship, some extremely beautiful, which are reserved for the greatest festivals; others again more simple, for everyday use. Most of these are the gifts of

pious benefactors, or presents for a first Mass from the relations of the priest.

In a great abbey many beautiful and valuable things are collected by degrees; but this is no mere dull collection of which there are quite enough in the world, where the sacred vessels, diverted from their holy purpose are kept solely for show in a glass case. Here each object finds its place on suitable occasions in the service of God. Hence, one may look at and admire the church plate in an abbey without any temptation to envy.

But the days are evil, and ungodly men have no respect for holy things, and look with longing eye upon these precious vessels; so the safe is carefully kept, and the Sacrist bolts and locks it securely. In many sacristies the doors and windows are hung with electric wires and bells to give notice of any robber during the night-time, but in ours, a good lay-brother keeps guard, sleeping at night in a cell directly overhead, in which a small hole in the floor can be opened which communicates with the Sacristy, so that the slightest noise cannot escape him.

But now our guide is hastening on, and we must not take up too much of his time; besides, it is quite impossible to look into everything that is stowed away in the Sacristy. So we will only take a hasty glance at the rest of the cupboards that line the walls. Here we see crucifixes, altar candlesticks, thuribles, and any number of cruets for wine and water. In the lower division are missals in every style of binding, rituals and liturgical books required for

different occasions. A special little cabinet is set apart for the holy oils. In the working Sacristy, which opens off the great one, the Brother Sacristans keep the carpets and cushions for feast days and all kinds of stuffs for hangings for the choir and the different altars on special occasions, also the candles, oil, incense, and other things of the kind. All this is enough to show us that the Sacristy well deserves the name of arsenal, since it has to provide everything that is requisite for the liturgical worship of God. But the very multiplicity of these things becomes wearisome, and we would rather invite our guests to come and see all these vestments and various objects in use in the service of God, where each in its proper place serves to enhance the grandeur and dignity of the worship, and all duly harmonise with one another.

It would be far more interesting to watch the life of the Sacristy. In that of a parish church all is still and lonely. When the morning service is over the custodian locks it up, and the whole livelong day not a thing is moving there, unless perchance some poor little church mouse is busily engaged in its destructive labours. It is quite otherwise in the abbey, for there the Sacristy is rarely empty, and there is always something or other to be done.

The first thing in the morning, before break of day, come some of the fathers who, having business to despatch, wish to say Mass betimes, and they find everything laid ready in the Sacristy. After Lauds at daybreak, the first series of fathers take possession of every altar in the church. So the Sacrist has to

light all the candles, provide servers, bring wine and water, and ascertain that nothing is wanting. All must go on noiselessly, for it is still the time of the Great Silence, when signs with head or fingers must be used instead of speech; and each priest finds on a little slate or ticket the name of the altar to which he is to go. When these first Masses are over, another set of priests are already in their albs, they receive the vestments and chalice from those who have preceded them, and with a profound inclination before the crucifix, set out, accompanied by their servers, on their holy pilgrimage to the Mount of God. Thus the Sacrist must be always close at hand, and often passing quickly backwards and forwards between the church and the Sacristy. Meanwhile penitents come and ring the confession bell, and he has to go off and find a father; then again, he has to ring the church bell for the parish Mass. And so it goes on the whole morning through, and when at times strange priests arrive, and the faithful come with some special requirement, he had need have four hands and four feet to satisfy all, and do everything at once.

Later in the day there is a little quieter time, when the Sacrist can draw a long breath, and then come his aids from the noviceship; all must be prepared for High Mass. The presses are opened once more, and the vestments are laid out on the table. Each has its appointed place, and not a thing must be wanting. The thurifer fetches his silver thurible and incense-boat, and he must see that he

has hot glowing charcoal; the lay-brothers come to serve as acolytes or torch-bearers, and must each receive a white cotta, for no one may approach the altar in work-day clothes. If, again, it is a great pontifical ceremony, then every one has more than enough to do. The Master of the Ceremonies hastens busily to and fro, and every case and cupboard in the Sacristy must bring forth its most precious contents, so that the Sacristy presents a scene of quiet stir and bustle, until at length all stand ready in a long row before the vestment table. Then, at a sign from the Master of the Ceremonies, they all bow before the cross, and, preceded by the torch-bearers, file off in long procession to the church.

When they return after the ceremony, all the vestments they have laid aside must be carefully hung up and put away, and very often the good brothers and the Sacrist have not yet finished when the bell rings for dinner. In the afternoon, when Vespers are over, for which all has to be prepared in the same way, the vestments have to be laid ready for the following morning. Then the Brother Sacristan has to bake the altar breads, and for this purpose he has a little stove on which the irons are heated in a room up in the tower, and there, like King Wenceslaus of old, he is happily employed in this holy occupation, and as he lays the little piles of clear, white, altar bread, one after another, on the dainty linen-cloth, he murmurs prayers in honour of the Blessed Sacrament. Then with the sharp iron cutter he stamps out the small and large

hosts, and fills the store boxes, for between clergy and faithful, the consumption in the church is very considerable; moreover, the neighbouring parish priests like to get their altar breads from the cloister. This is, for him, after all the running hither and thither of the morning, a much-loved hour of peace, and many a confidential talk does he have with those mysterious little breads which are destined to become a propitiatory offering for all mankind.

Meanwhile the novices are busy in the Sacristy marking the missals for the following day, so that no disturbance should occur from the priest having to search for the proper prayers when at the altar. And then on the long vestment table, as many vestments are laid ready as there are altars in the church, and everything requisite is set out in perfect order.

In the room next door, two brothers are busy cleaning the brass candlesticks and vases. Here again is a workshop for all kind of handiwork, for there is always something to make or to mend, and in the monastery they never leave to others what they can do themselves. So the brothers in the Sacristy understand all sorts of work, and when their skill and experience is insufficient, then a brotherly hand from the smithy or the carpenters' shop comes to their aid. Before the great festivals there is much to be done in cleaning and decorating the church and dressing the altars, and it is on such occasions as these that hangings of all sorts and banners and scrolls emerge from their hiding-places.

Massive candelabra are set up, or pyramids of lights, and a great carpet is laid down which covers the whole space from the altar to the choir; the hot-house sends in plants and flowers, and many hands are employed in weaving wreaths and garlands, and suspending them from airy heights.

Of a truth all the outward show wherewith we celebrate the Divine office and surround the sacred mysteries is but wretched trumpery in the sight of God, but it is necessary for ourselves, since we require that which impresses our senses, and we desire also to bring all created things into the service of God. And it is also the will of God that we should present Him with the best of all that He has given us.

But our attention has been attracted for some time to a heavy iron door at one end of the Sacristy, before which a bronze lamp is burning. Over the arch is inscribed, in Gothic characters, cut deep into the stone: CUSTODIT DOMINUS OMNIA OSSA EORUM. We are told it is the door of the Treasury, and that the Father Treasurer shall be asked to come and show us the treasures within. The curiosity of some of our guests is greatly excited at this information. They had heard so much in the world of the riches of the monastic Orders, and now they will see for themselves. Presently the Treasurer arrives with a large bunch of keys, and the heavy door is made to swing slowly open. We enter, and are surprised to find ourselves in a lofty chapel, very lofty indeed for its size, lighted by windows high up in the wall.

Opposite us is an altar, and in the midst of the chapel stands a large Gothic shrine covered with a pall of red velvet embroidered in gold. Ranged along the walls are oak presses, the doors of which are elaborately carved and strengthened by ornamental iron work.

We first approach the altar, and kneeling down before it, the Treasurer, after lighting some tapers, recites prayers in honour of the saints whose relics repose in the chapel. For, to tell the truth, this Treasury is a chapel of holy relics, and the Treasurer has nothing more precious under his care than the splintered bones and mouldering dust of the saints and martyrs of God. No treasure is so highly prized as these, none so greatly desired. To obtain them, monks of old have made many a long pilgrimage, and endured many a hardship and danger. The sacred remains have often been rescued from the hands of the persecutor at the risk of life, and once obtained, no pains have been spared, no expense been grudged, to give them a fitting shrine. We read how the monks of St Alban's deprived themselves of food that they might save money to adorn the shrine of their patron, and how lovingly the monks of Durham and Bury cared for the resting-places of St Cuthbert and St Edmund. We have knelt, perhaps, in the desecrated Abbey of Westminster before the dismantled shrine of the Confessor, and marked the monogram of Abbot Feckenham carved upon the woodwork, telling us how the first care of the monks, when put again in possession of their own, was to restore the shrine of their founder-saint. And we are

now kneeling in the Treasury of a modern abbey, and we shall find displayed here the same zeal and love for holy relics which marked the monks of old. True it is that the greatest treasures have been dispersed, that the fury of Protestant or Revolutionist has scattered to the winds the sacred dust of many a glorious saint, still we shall have reason to marvel here that so much has been preserved, and to admire the love which has gathered up so carefully the fragments that nothing be lost.

Over the stone altar stands a large picture, representing St Gregory the Great, piercing a cloth which had enveloped the bones of the martyrs, and from which blood is flowing. This miracle was worked to prove the sanctity and the inestimable value of even such secondary relics, and we are reminded that in the time of the Apostles handkerchiefs that they had touched were found efficacious for the healing of many. The picture forms the centre of a triptych. On the wings are painted figures of the Blessed John Thorne, the Treasurer of Glastonbury Abbey, who was martyred for "robbing Glaston Church" (*i.e.*, for saving what he could of the sacred treasures entrusted to him from the greed of Henry VIII., and who is thus the patron of monastic Treasurers), and St Wilfrid, Bishop of Hexham, whose devotion to holy relics was remarkable even in the ages of faith. Beneath the altar reposes the body of a martyr from the Catacombs of St Callixtus. We are bidden to observe the phial of blood by his side, and the touching inscription on the stone with which formerly

was sealed the *loculus* in which he lay. The covering from the central shrine is now removed, and we can feast our eyes on the splendid jewels, the golden images, and silver repoussé work, which make it worthy to be the resting-place of a large portion of the relics of the abbey's patron saint. Twice a year, on his feast day and on that of the dedication of the church, this shrine is carried to the High Altar, where it remains during the octave, exposed to the veneration of the faithful. On the feast of holy relics, it is the principal object of interest in the great procession of relics. In form it is like a little church with central tower, in which the saint's head is preserved. Around the sides are images of saints connected with the history of the patron and of his abbey. The presses round the walls are now opened, and they display a goodly sight. They are lined with red velvet, and on their shelves are ranged reliquaries of all shapes and all epochs, from the archaic bust which holds the head of a sainted abbot, to the modern ostensory which enshrines the bones of one of the blessed English martyrs. It is seldom we can see in these days so large a collection of holy relics, but the dear saints know where they are loved and honoured best, and they seem to love to repose in the peace of the cloister. There is hardly a saint whose name we know of which the Father Treasurer cannot show us at least a small relic: while many are of great size and interest. Besides the bones, on some of which can still be clearly traced the marks of axe or sword, are here preserved vestments that have been worn by saintly personages during their lifetime, the mitre of

a holy bishop, the ring of a sainted abbot, and the chasuble in which a martyr said his last Mass. Here, too, are many letters of the saints, relics which always have a special interest for visitors, and in a little shrine is preserved the formula of profession made and signed by a monk who later on shed his blood in defence of the Catholic Faith.

We notice on one side of the chapel that there is a little door in the wall. From this a staircase, contrived in the thickness of the wall, leads to a platform far above. Our guide goes first, and opening for us another door we find ourselves in a large balcony or tribune looking into the choir aisle of the abbey church. From this balcony, on certain great solemnities, the relics are displayed for the veneration of the faithful.

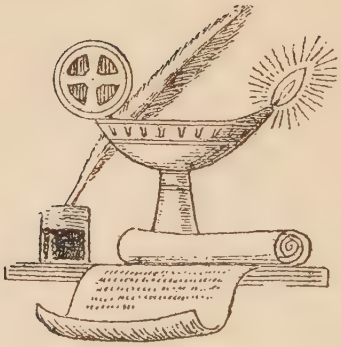
In another place this wall is pierced much lower down by a window guarded with a strong grating. This opens directly on to the aisle, and when pilgrims desire to venerate the relics, or when Holy Mass is said at the altar, the Treasurer opens the inner shutters, and thus they are able to command a view of the whole chapel without entering it. These shutters are hung with bells, whose melodious tinkling speedily attracts the notice of the faithful whenever the shutters are opened, and which serve, too, as a safeguard against thieves.

But we have, perchance, lingered too long in our description of the Treasury, and need only add that Holy Mass is said here every morning by the Treasurer, who is also responsible for exposing the relic of each saint as

his feast day comes round. The reliquary is usually placed in a niche on the balcony already mentioned, surrounded by lights and flowers, so that all can see and venerate it. But on greater feasts, the High Altar is adorned with reliquaries, and when the feast of a saint is celebrated of whom we have a specially noteworthy relic, the whole convent approach to kiss it after the High Mass. Meanwhile, antiphons and hymns are sung by the choir, and after all have venerated the relic, it is censed, and the prayer of the saint is sung. Finally, it is raised in benediction over the kneeling monks, and then solemnly carried back to its usual resting-place.

The Treasury is connected with the Sacristy, and its guardian is one of the officials who form the assistants (or *solatia*, as our Holy Father terms it) of the Sacrist. The two offices are indeed closely connected, and not infrequently are filled by the same monk. The two monks who accompanied the Blessed Abbot of Glastonbury to martyrdom were respectively Treasurer and Sacrist of their abbey church. In ancient times the Sacrist, or one of his assistants, always slept in the Church, and at Oxford and St Albans, we can still visit the "watching-chambers" erected for the use of the guardians of the shrines of St Alban and St Frideswide. The responsibility attached to these offices is, indeed, a very weighty one, but, at the same time, we can well understand that they are regarded among the most honourable and most happy positions to which a monk can be raised by his superiors. For the Sacrist

and his assistants are continually occupied in the immediate service of the Sanctuary, and their device is ever, "*Domine dilexi decorem domus tuæ*," "Lord, I have loved the beauty of Thy House, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth."



CHAPTER XV

THE SCHOOL OF ART

A SCHOOL of Art in the cloister? I see a shake of the head and an incredulous smile. It is true, too true, unhappily, that a school of art suggests to modern ears associations the reverse of monastic or even Christian. The art of the Paris Salon or the Royal Academy has little affinity with the religious life, and if report say true, the art students and the art schools of our great cities are not precisely schools of virtue.

But none the less art has her home in the cloister, even though it be an art which is little understood and little appreciated by modern taste. The fact is that people have no longer any true conception either of art or of the cloister. A monastery is supposed to be "a barracks for assistant priests," whose sole duty and occupation is the care of souls, preaching and giving missions, whose highest aim should therefore surely be to be there as little as possible. And as to art, well, Sebastian Brunner's words, if harsh, are all too true: "Art in its decline and degradation has become the slave of the lowest passions . . . it has

lost its true divine vocation, and has left the church to return to the service of paganism."

This style of art, if indeed it be worthy of the name, we need not look for in the cloister; but nevertheless that art which breathes of heaven and raises souls to God, may well find a home in our abbey, since a monastery is a representation in miniature of the universal Church, representing, as it does, the Christian family in its full significance, development, and activity.

The school of art finds its home in the large light rooms that form the upper story of a retired wing of the monastic buildings. It is a little kingdom in itself, and yet closely united with the organisation of the monastic family by the same laws, the fraternal community life, the worship of God in common, and, above all, by the same fatherly head. We need not expect to find here luxurious studios, got up with all the extravagance of a sensual fancy. No gorgeous hangings and silken stuffs, rich vessels, shining armour, or sweet-smelling flowers, surround us here, but simple and austere is the aspect of these monastic rooms, and only the grave figures of holy men and women look down upon us from the cartoons with which the walls are covered. Along the wide corridor is a row of small cells, which differ little from those of the other religious. Monastic art is chiefly an art for the cell. Reared in solitude, in prayer, and contemplation, it shuns the noisy crowd, for whose approbation it has never catered; it blossoms, like some lovely flower of the good God, for Him alone, to glorify whom is its one object.

We find the inmates of these cells bending diligently over their table, busied with sketches or studies. Masterpieces of ancient art and of the early Christian schools, cover the walls, in order to place before the eye that spiritual nourishment of noble forms and Christian ideals which it requires, when, wearied with work, it would recuperate its powers in rest and meditation. One or two only of the larger rooms really deserve to be called studios in the ordinary sense of the word; these are light and lofty, and destined for the production of the larger cartoons, or for modelling in plaster. A number of younger artists are here under the guidance of an older religious (all dressed in the simple attire of lay-brothers), and are engaged on various works, with the grave diligence of mature artists. Here also monastic silence prevails, that prayerful hush, that interior recollection, which sanctifies all labour throughout the whole monastery. Before we profit by the permission granted us of examining the work more closely, and decide whether it deserves the name of art, we will endeavour to answer the question which has already been raised, whether art is suited to the cloister, and if so, what kind of art?

If it be fitting for artists to become inmates of the cloister, doubtless art has a right to be found there also. Now we have already pointed out that our dear Lord and Saviour gave His evangelical counsels, which are the fundamental principle of every Religious Order, to all men of every race, age, and station, and that our Holy Father, St Benedict, did not refuse admittance to the cloister to either bond or free,

peasant, knight, or prince, artisan, or man of learning Nay, what is more, his Holy Rule has an especial chapter on the artists and the artificers of the monastery; so that clearly, artists have here the rights of citizens, and art may seek a place of refuge within the cloister walls. A well-known historian, speaking of the period when the Roman Empire was overthrown by the influx of Germanic tribes, and ancient art lost its home, says: "But then monasteries and religious institutes opened wide their doors, and received the terrified daughter of heaven under their protection." Another says: "The Rule, under which all the monasteries of the west were either wholly or partially founded, the Rule of St Benedict, imposes on the religious not only devotional exercises, but also manual labour, and this command they adhered to for centuries. Hence, far on into the Middle Ages, the whole history of art is mixed up with monastic history, and all the names and the works we there find mentioned are the names and the works of monks. Painters and monks were ideas commonly connected.

The development of liturgical worship in the monasteries necessitated, in fact, the development of art. The adornment of the temple of God became the great pre-occupation of the monastic family, and majestic abbey churches sprang up on all sides, whose very ruins attest the artistic skill as much as the pious zeal of their builders. The architects were monks, and very often abbots; not content, however, with drawing the plans, the monks laboured at the building with their own hands, and even quarried and transported from great distances the vast blocks of

stone needed for column or architecture. Their hands twined the massive capitals with delicate wreaths of sculptured flowers, making the long-drawn aisles blossom like a forest in the springtide. After the building itself was finished, the monks turned their attention to painting, wood-carving, and all kinds of decorative arts.

The walls were covered with sacred frescoes, teaching the mysteries of the faith in a way that even the unlettered could understand, while crucifix and candlestick, shrine and reliquary, chalice and bell, told of the skill to which the patient brethren had attained in the arts of the goldsmith, the lapidary, and the bell-founder. And thus the whole church was as one great hymn of praise to the Incarnate God, who deigns to take up His abode among the sons of men. For every stone and every ornament spoke eloquently of God's love for man, and of man's love for God.

We need not enumerate the monasteries which were the special homes of art, nor give a list of monks whose works have immortalised their names. The history of art has saved us the trouble, the facts are sufficiently well known, and we need not fear contradiction.

But, perhaps, another objection is now raised: "All this is very well, and very fine, and no doubt quite uncontrovertible. Monasteries, indeed, have done much for art—one must acknowledge that for centuries they sheltered it, safe-guarded, cultivated, and very greatly developed it. But nowadays? What is the good of art in the cloister, now that out in the world it is being so widely propagated, and

so brilliantly cultivated? Have we not academie of art in every capital? Does not the public find scope for practising and studying the fine arts in museums, galleries, art exhibitions, and public lectures? Are there not hosts of skilful architects, sculptors, and painters? Are not the productions of modern art propagated far and wide amongst all classes, by the ever-increasing power of multiplying them in hundreds of thousands by means of prints, with or without colour? Who would imprison art nowadays in the cloister, checking her free development, clothing her in a religious habit, and letting her starve to the sound of penitential psalms?" This is pretty much the opinion of the majority of the friends of modern art, and finds its echo in the assent of the unthinking crowd.

But are truly Christian people, the sound kernel of the faithful, of this opinion? We have every reason for doubting it, since all natural religious feeling teaches us to prefer works before which we can pray, to those which seek only to give pleasure. Art has indeed sought the low level of the public squares and streets; in order to be universally admired, it has laid itself open to become vulgar, and has completely banished all modesty and reserve. These are hard words, and we do not extend them to all works of profane art; but they apply to a very large portion of the so-called "works of art," which are to be found in our exhibitions. We are speaking here, indeed, of sacred art, but it is necessary to note in what company it finds itself. Should we hang a sacred picture amongst works of a purely naturalistic, even basely sensual character? That it is done and

can be done, without shame or fear of giving offence, does not say much for its worth. Christ, our Lord, associated with publicans and sinners, but they were penitent, and that is more than can be said of the Magdalenes in our galleries. Not long ago a painter complained to me that his picture of the Saviour carrying His cross had been refused at a public exhibition. I allowed myself to congratulate him, for the only objection that could be made to the picture was its deep religious significance; and, therefore, it naturally was out of place amongst pictures of a very different kind. One might well have said with Goethe: "It cuts me to the heart, my friend, to see thee amidst such company." Most artists of note desire to add to their fame by painting some sacred picture, but how can the brush so lately steeped in the colours of licentious paganism, be turned so promptly to the supernatural and the sublime?

The divine message is, to such artists as these, but a pious legend, for faith is wanting; and the dainty aureole around heads full of earthly sensuous beauty can never raise them above the level of the models that inspired them. We are, however, far from wishing to maintain that art cannot remain pure and religious in the world, just as well as thousands of pious souls do; but still we must not blame her, if, as of old, she should knock at the cloister door, if not to save herself from utter destruction, at any rate, to be preserved from corruption. Nay, more, it is for the cloister to help Christian art to return to the right path, and to recover the purity and sanctity of a virgin consecrated to God.

In the days of the iconoclastic persecution, it was the monks who most staunchly defended the holy images, and consequently the fury of the Emperor Constantine Copronyonus was chiefly directed against them. Thousands died by the hand of the executioner, and their monasteries were given as a prey to the flames. Thus they became martyrs for Christian art, and thus they purchased, at the price of their own blood, the right to shelter her in the cloister.

We feel incapable of entering more fully into deeper mysteries of art, but yonder is the headmaster of our art school, a venerable monk, with long flowing grey beard, who is standing meditatively before a statue of our Holy Father, St Benedict, which a younger brother has just been modelling under his supervision. We will arouse him a little while from his meditations and question him on the principles of his art. He turns and looks at us with a kindly gravity, as if to see whether we are in earnest, then his bright grey eyes gaze gratefully upwards, and he begins to speak to us in his clear and simple way, putting powerful emphasis on every word.

"As monks have chosen the praise of God, the highest duty of man, for their life-long calling, so should religious art ever seek the glory of God, the noblest object of all art. Therefore is she a priestess of the Most High, and of his Holy Church, whose aureole she weaves in rays of shimmering light, thus making her visible to all. The noblest duties are confided to her: the building and beautifying of the house of God on earth, the representations of the Incarnate God, of His ever Blessed Virgin Mother,

of the holy angels and blessed saints, and the symbolising of the great mysteries and divine truths. Incapable, it is true, of ever attaining to the ideal, religious art selects from the noblest productions of all ages, those forms which are purest and most sublime. The liturgy of the Church which she serves, completing, interpreting, and enriching it, will itself give her the befitting style; and she seeks to spiritualise, in the light of her supernatural ideal, those forms which she has produced, according to the eternal laws of beauty. The enjoyment of the spectator will be all the greater, the purer, and the more ideal the form. The representation of the mysteries of the faith should prepare the soul of the beholder for the future unveiled vision, and the heart for the promised glory of beatitude, and thus serve the Redeemer as a mighty instrument for the enlightenment and sanctification of His redeemed."

The Master ceases.

And is monastic art really called and qualified to approach such an ideal as this? Can it be proposed to the world as a model? In a certain sense, we may, without presumption, reply in the affirmative. There is only one perfection, and hence there can be but one aim in art, so that we should not speak of "monkish art" as if there were a peculiar art proper to monks and for monks alone. They, too, are striving, like their brother artists, to portray the unique Truth and Beauty in lovely forms, which may be intelligible to all mankind.

After such a lofty view of the significance of monastic art, I scarcely dare take our guests to

inspect the labours of our artists, and yet it is for this purpose they have come up here. Well, then, their works must defend themselves. I will only say that those will be able to appreciate them best who study them with attention and care. A mere superficial glance reveals defects, but it takes time and study to fully grasp the spirit of devotion which gives these works a spiritual beauty all their own. They are most admired by those who know them best, and further study often turns impatient criticism into strong admiration.

On the easels are chiefly large cartoons in crayon, the designs for frescoes to be executed on walls, and that is why the compositions are so simple and so large, and their treatment so monumental and grave in style. Here are scenes from the life of St Benedict and his first monks; yonder is a series of pictures from the life of the Mother of God, executed with all the love of the children, and all the reverence of the servants of Mary; striking, too, are those Stations of the Way of the Cross; that Coronation of our Lady, against the golden background, reminds one of Fiesole and the Beato Angelico. On all sides we may see single figures of saints, lovely in their simplicity, which a young brother is painting in water-colours, and which are intended for reproduction. Those adoring angels are quite startling in their solemn earnestness in that picture of the Mystery of the Redemption; and this representation of the Crucifixion of the Incarnate God,—the most sublime and inspiring of all subjects for art—seems to place the idea of the great Sacrifice before us in a very

striking way. But, of course, the productions of our school of art will be better understood and more effective in the place for which they are destined. We have seen them adorning the walls of the church, the cloister, the chapter house, and the frater. At every step they accompany the monk, and surround him with holy impressions. There can be no more beautiful decoration, nothing that will more strongly move the heart to devotion, than a solemn Crucifixion, or a gracious representation of our Blessed Lady standing out from the wall, such as those the great Florentine used to paint for love of his art, in the cells of his brethren at San Marco.*

And who are these artists? Fathers, brothers, oblates, all engaged in the most varied works; from young beginners up to mature masters, each has his own place, in accordance with his capacity, and all are united by the bond of the same holy aim under the monastic rule.

This it is, indeed, which gives to their productions

* In these ateliers the designs are drawn, which are carried out by the joiners, carvers, and metal workers. If the number of the community admitted of it, it would be desirable that as of old, everything intended for the service of God should be made in the monastery itself, from correct and artistic designs; for the manufacturers, who have nowadays taken all this out of our hands, often do their work in a most tasteless and superficial way, so that it be "good for trade"; whereas, for the service of God, nothing can be too costly, or executed with too great care. The designs, too, for the embroideries on the vestments, are prepared here, though they are executed by the skilful fingers of our religious sisters, who are also endeavouring to withdraw this sacred art from the hands of manufactories, and from the miserable degradation of machinery.

unity of spirit and similarity of style. Hence, there are no artistic singularities, no conceited, self-seeking eccentricities. Those who work are the members of an Order, and do not labour for themselves, they seek not for temporal reward, nor for their own renown; and they do not sign their pictures with their own names but with that of their monastery. The secret of their simple and severely liturgical style lies in this simplicity of aim, but even more in the spirit of prayer which animates them. They draw their inspirations from that Divine Office which is the power of their daily life, they seek it in the Tabernacle, that never-failing source of heavenly thoughts; they are prayerful workers, that is to say, they work praying, and for those who pray; and their work, which moves us to pray, is itself a prayer in stone and colour.*

And is work of this description unintelligible to the public? Certainly not. The faithful show a preference for pictures which speak to the heart with genuine devotion, even if exterior beauty of form be wanting, and the power of fervent prayer has often

* The Dominican, Lippo Dalmasio, prepared himself by fasting and Holy Communion to paint the Holy Mother of God; and Foster says of Fra Angelico: "Should any one inquire if it is really true that this pious artist could only paint the representations of Christ on the Cross after much previous prayer on his knees, amid tears and sobs, and with a beating heart, this doubt will vanish before the paintings in San Marco. Nay, more, if he be not himself strangely hard and unimpressionable, he will be unable to restrain his own tears at the sight of that countenance, in which is no trace of reproach, but the most touching expression of kindness and compassionate sympathy."

pierced the heavens and made such pictures the instruments of Divine miracles, and of many supernatural graces. If we keep ever in view, as the true object of all religious art, the glory of God and the inspiring of genuine devotion,—art will then become more like that of the early Christian times, with its sublime dogmatic earnestness of presentment, than are the modern vapid productions which usurp its name. Nor will it be wanting in either spirit or form, but as a pure soul manifests itself in the clear frank eye, so will the sublimity of the conception be reflected in the spiritual beauty of the form.

We have already alluded to the oblates, and it may be well to explain who and what they are. There are oblates living in the world,* men and women, clients of St Benedict, who belong to his family, are led by his spirit, and receive great graces in exchange for but few obligations. There are, again, other oblates who, according to the institution of William of Hirschau, live in the cloister, but without being bound by vows or Rule. They enjoy all the privileges of the regular life, with greater freedom than the religious, and this they use for the good of the abbey, by their intercourse with the outer world.

The younger oblates of the school of art are mainly employed in the theoretical and practical study of their calling, though they have also to complete the ordinary classical and philosophical training. Later on, it will be decided, according to their dispositions

* These are sometimes called *Confratres*. Blessed Thomas More was thus attached to the Monastery of Christchurch, Canterbury.

and other circumstances, whether they are to be admitted into the ranks of the choir-monks, or to remain on as oblates.

The name of oblate is also sometimes given to the alumni of the monastery. These form, as it were, the nursery-garden of the cloister, and are one of its main hopes for the future. They are lads who have felt in the years of their innocent boyhood a call to the religious life, and who have been sent by their friends and relations to be prepared for that life within the shelter of the cloister. Here, like St Placid and St Maurus, the first oblates offered to our Holy Father St Benedict, like St Bede in the Abbey of Jarrow, and St Boniface at Nutshall, these happy little lads are brought up in virtue and learning, and look forward with eager longing to the day when they will be allowed to give themselves to God. They receive a first-rate education, and at the same time are instructed in the duties of the religious life to which they aspire. Happily shielded from most of the temptations which beset the young student in the world, they grow at once in stature, wisdom, and grace. At the same time their life is made as free and as joyous as possible. They are not over-dosed with religion; or trained into priggishness, they are true boys, overflowing with fun and mischief, and as fond of cricket and football and noisy games as any other healthy lads. They assist at the Conventual Mass, and at Compline in the choir, and on feast days also at Vespers. The rest of the day is divided between study and play. In the holidays they make expeditions to various places of interest, and

though they may often spend a fortnight or so in the summer at the seaside or at some farmhouse in the country, they do not as a general rule go home for their holidays. But their parents are encouraged to come and see them, and now and again they spend a few days at home, so that their vocation may be thoroughly tested. Of course some of them do not persevere, but a good proportion do, and they make excellent religious. They have had more opportunities even than other novices of seeing whether the monastic life is suited to their needs, and they have become in the truest sense children of the house. They are regarded with paternal affection by the monks, especially by those who have charge of them. The Superior of the alumni has the title of Rector, and he is assisted by a Prefect, and by professors of different branches of study, who are of course all members of the community. If there is also a college attached to the abbey, the alumni share the classes of the students, but are otherwise kept apart from them. The alumnate forms, in fact, a little establishment of its own, and it is a very lively and happy one. Many Christian parents are proud to entrust their sons to the monks, and look forward with almost as much eagerness as the lads themselves, to the day of their holy profession. The alumni, it should be noted, are all intended to be choir monks, and therefore are not taken, as a rule, from the lower classes. Their parents pay a small pension which just covers the cost of their keep and provide them with clothes, etc. They do not wear any part of the monastic habit, as they do in some monasteries, except in choir, where they wear a tunic and girdle.

In ancient times they were offered solemnly by their parents, and their hands were wrapped in the altar-cloth, as a sign of their consecration to God. Later on, if they persevered in their holy desire, they were not professed like other novices, as the ceremony of their oblation was considered sufficient. In this way St Thomas Aquinas was offered as a little boy at Monte Cassino. But for many centuries the Church has not permitted that children should be thus offered by their parents, except on the condition that when they come to years of discretion they should ratify the offering of their own free will and choice. Our alumni, then, are not oblates in the true sense of the word, since they are free as air to go or stay, and they make their holy profession in precisely the same manner as novices who enter directly from the world.

Happy, indeed, are these little ones of the cloister, who, after an innocent and joyous boyhood spent in the fear and love of God, offer themselves in the glad strength of their early manhood to the service of the King of Kings, and receive as their portion the beatitude of those who dwell in the Lord's House, and are for ever praising Him. "*Beati qui habitant in domo tua, Domine, in sæcula sæculorum laudabunt te.*"

CHAPTER XVI

THE NOVITIATE

THE bells are ringing out loudly and solemnly their call to Vespers. Our guests have followed us so faithfully through the whole course of the monastic day, that we think we may invite them to this last hour of the Divine Office.

As we pass through the cloister, where the monks have already ranged themselves for the *Statio*, we see a notice put up on a small board : "After Vespers, Clothing and *Mandatum*." This is a ceremony for which the guests would like to be admitted to the Chapter-house, and at which, therefore, we will make a point of being present. The monks have taken their places in choir, and now begin None, the last of the lesser day hours. During the concluding prayer, the Celebrant and his assistants, vested in copes, enter the choir, and, preceded by torch-bearers and thurifer, go to the altar. After a short prayer, they take up their position in the sanctuary, and the organ with its full

tones accompanies the solemn opening prayer. Then the priest intones the first antiphon of Vespers, which gives the festive note to the psalms and antiphons that follow. Next comes the glorious Messianic psalm: "*Dixit Dominus Domino Meo*" "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit Thou at My right hand,"—"God spoke to God, to my Lord, raise up Thy divine manhood to the eternal glorious throne of My Divinity." And grandly does this song of praise, the typical psalm in honour of the eternal Priest and King, sound forth amid the rich chords of the organ. Throughout the whole ecclesiastical year it is the triumphal song of the Church militant, to the sound of which she unfurls the banner of her victorious High Priest, and to which succeed in harmonious variety the other Vesper psalms.

Vespers is the evening sacrifice of the Old Testament; it is of the same construction as Lauds, with which, indeed, it is closely connected, and it forms the most ancient and most popular portion of the Church's prayer. It was arranged in its present form by our Holy Father St Benedict. As it was fixed for the hour before sunset, it lost the character of evening prayer, and became the solemn afternoon service of the people. It is placed midway between two feasts—that of the day and that of the morrow—so that it resounds joyously with the one while it announces the approach of the other. The convenient afternoon hour, and the great exterior solemnity with which it is celebrated, makes the Office of Vespers the most popular of the canonical hours,—indeed, we may say with sorrow, that it is the only one generally known or

attended at the present day. Although the psalms and antiphons of the Church have, alas, been too often replaced by litanies, hymns, and popular devotions, still the great festivals, at any rate, are distinguished by the singing of solemn Vespers. In cathedral churches Vespers are daily sung (at any rate in Catholic lands), and in the Latin countries the people know and for the most part join in singing the psalms. Next to High Mass, the greatest outward pomp is shown in the celebration of Vespers, and it is then that the chant makes use of its loveliest melodies. After the psalms follows the chapter and responsory, then the hymn. To the hymn succeeds the *Magnificat*. All rise, and make the sign of the Cross, the priest goes up to the altar and envelopes that place of holy sacrifice with clouds of sweet smelling incense. Every day of the year, even on that most sorrowful one, Good Friday,* Holy Church sings Mary's canticle of praise, that grand song of humility in which she pours forth the overflowing gratitude of her most pure heart. It is, as it were, the climax of Vespers, and arouses on every feast day fresh thoughts and emotions. With St Gertrude, who was so penetrated with the liturgical spirit, we may see in contemplation the saint whose feast is being kept standing in all the radiance of his heavenly glory, before the throne of the Most Blessed Trinity, intoning the *Magnificat*, in which, with an inclination towards him, all the blessed choirs of angels and saints unite.

* On Maundy Thursday and Good Friday the *Magnificat* is recited, though not sung.

As the chords of the *Salve Regina* die away, the Master of Ceremonies, accompanied by some of the brothers, carrying crosier and mitre, approach the Abbot, and vest him in amice and cope. Two torch-bearers appear at the entrance to the choir, and the lay-brothers going first, the whole convent proceeds in solemn procession from the choir to the Chapter House. After the Abbot has taken his place, all sit down in the stalls which line the walls. With covered head they gravely await the beginning of the ceremony. The Novice Master goes out into the middle of the hall and informs the Abbot that some seculars are standing at the door, who beg to receive the religious habit. "Go, and bring them in," says the Abbot.*

A young student, who desires to exchange his secular attire for the religious habit, and a brother postulant, who has been working for some months on the abbey-farm, enter, their hands folded, their eyes cast down, and going into the middle of the Chapter House, they there prostrate themselves, like the penitents of early Christian times, their faces to the ground, on a carpet which has been spread for them. "What do you want?" inquires the Abbot gently. "The mercy of God, and the fellowship of your community," they answer. The Abbot replies, "May God grant you the companionship of His elect!" "Amen," resounds from the ranks of the religious. "Rise, in the name of the Lord," continues the Abbot, and the postulants, rising, remain on their knees. The convent uncover their

* Of course all is said in Latin.

heads, while the Abbot takes his crosier, and addresses a word of earnest exhortation to the young men kneeling before him. "What have you come for? What do you seek in the cloister? Not a comfortable life, free from care. The habit for which you ask obliges you to separate from the world, from all that hitherto you have held dear. It implies the Cross, which you have to take up; you must renounce your own will, to follow Christ in obedience, humility, and patience; Do you feel within you the call and the strength for this?" "Not in my own strength do I trust, but in the mercy of God, who refuses His grace to none who hope in Him," is the humble reply. Then the Abbot joyfully exclaims, "What God has thus begun in you, may He Himself also accomplish!"

The antiphon, "Blessed are ye," is then intoned, and the choir continues, "When men hate you, and when they shall separate you and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake, be glad and rejoice, for your reward will be great in heaven" (Luke vi, 22). The Precentor next intones the *Benedictus*, and whilst the alternate sides of the choir continue it, the clothing begins. It is a solemn and most significant action, and far more than a mere ceremony which now takes place between the Abbot and the postulant kneeling at his feet. In obedience to the voice of God, who calls him to His service, this young man is changing his outward attire, in token of the change within him. The accustomed dress in which he could go freely about in the world and with the world is taken from him

with the words: "The Lord take away from you the old man, and his works." Then they clothe him in the habit of the Order, which symbolises poverty, and the Abbot says to him, "The Lord clothe thee in the new man, which, according to God, is created in justice and true holiness."* They gird him with the leathern girdle, which recalls holy chastity, with the words: "May justice be the girdle of thy loins, and remember that another shall gird thee and shall lead thee whither thou wouldst not." Finally, he receives the scapular, the distinctive garb of the monk, which is to remind him of obedience and labour: "Receive the yoke of our Lord Jesus Christ, and carry His burden, which is sweet and light, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

When our first parents after the Fall were about to begin a new life, God Himself gave them clothing, made of the skins of beasts. When a noble youth was knighted, his armour was put upon him piece by piece. A king makes his courtiers and attendants wear the colours of his house; a bridegroom sends to his bride her ornaments and jewels. The religious habit of the young Benedictine is the black garb of penance, in which he is to begin a new life for God; it is the strong armour, that will serve to defend him against the violence of the enemy;

* It is the custom for the postulant to wear on his Clothing-day the insigna of his rank or profession: and it is a striking sight to see, as we have done, an officer in the brilliant uniform of a cavalry regiment, or a Monsignore in his purple robes, kneeling at the Abbot's feet to receive in exchange for all these splendours the humble and penitential habit of St Benedict.

it is the raimant to be worn at the court of the heavenly King, and in which we shall stand in His presence as His especial servants; it is, finally, the bridal garment which the heavenly Bridegroom sends for His espousals with our soul. Truly this habit is of no slight significance, this exterior change denotes the determination of an entire conversion of the inner man. It is the consummation of the choice of the religious state. In early times, this assuming of the religious habit signified profession itself; it was the irrevocable and complete self-oblation, the mystical espousals, and the reception into the Order. The maternal caution of Holy Church has now, however, adopted several degrees for the completion of this great act, such as the greater weakness of both our spiritual and corporal natures at the present day require, so that the clothing forms at present the first act, the choice of the state of life.

From all eternity, in His predestinating grace God has appointed the way by which He will lead each one to Himself; hence all ways are right and all stations of life good, but "all things are not fitting for every one." It is not the fascinations of earth, ambition, or transitory goods, but it is the will of God that must guide us, if we do not wish to go astray, and to have to steer the bark of life rudderless and labouring against wind and tide.

Therefore, neither parents nor teachers ought to seek to decide or persuade, or in any way to interfere, with the guidance of God, which He has reserved to Himself.

These two happy men who have just received the holy habit have made their choice. Touched by a ray of God's grace, they have made His Will, which they recognised in the secret attraction of their hearts, their own. Now they are standing on the threshold, and the door of the cloister is opened to them. From our hearts we desire that their present prayer may be heard: "One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I require, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

The newly clothed postulants retire, and the Master of Novices brings forward five more, who, after a time of probation, are now to be received into the Novitiate. They also first prostrate themselves on the ground, and to them likewise is the question addressed: "What do you desire?" And the same reply as before is given, with even greater confidence. The Abbot shows them the book of the Holy Rule, saying: "Behold, my sons, the law under which you must fight: if you can observe it, enter in; but if you cannot, freely depart!" They reply: "Not in my own strength, but by the mercy of God, I hope and desire to be able to observe it."

This entering on the year's noviceship, prescribed by the Church, is a very important act; for by the noviceship is put seriously to the test whether the vocation be from God, and whether the will to correspond with it be firm. Having hitherto been treated more or less as a guest, the postulant now becomes in the noviceship a child of the house. He does not, it is true, enter fully as yet upon all the rights of a son, for these demand the entire holocaust of the vows, but still

he is received into the bosom of the family, like the grain of corn which is cast into mother earth, to be born again to a new and more fruitful life. The novice is prepared to forsake all—house and country, brothers and sisters, father and mother—for the love of Christ; he shall receive a hundredfold in return, and as a pledge of this promise he may, from this day forward, feel himself already a son and a brother. Instead of the parents he has left, he finds a tenderly solicitous father, and a whole tribe of affectionate brothers.

The five who kneel together at the Abbot's feet, listening eagerly to the solemn and gentle words of exhortation which fall from his lips, are of different ages and positions in the world, and come from different homes and surroundings, but all are of one mind in striving towards the same end—profession in the holy Order. Three of them are young students who have left the theological lecture-room, because they have heard a more powerful voice calling them to the school of perfection. The fourth is a young officer who has resolved henceforth to serve under the standard of Christ and St Benedict. The fifth would appear to have been buffeted about a good deal on the stormy waves of the world before he drifted into this sheltering haven; he belongs to those received at the eleventh hour, to those in whom the power of grace has been most wondrously shown; he is a convert from Protestantism.

The Abbot addresses them as his most beloved sons, and now that he is on the point of receiving them as such to his paternal embrace, he gives to

each new child a new name. This traditional custom of the cloister reminds the novice that he is to begin a new life as a new man. As the Vicar of Christ adopts a new name to signify that he belongs no longer to himself but to the Church, so does this new name recall to the novice that he must be changed inwardly as well as outwardly, and belong henceforward to a new family. The name which the Abbot now gives him has been hitherto a mystery, and the listening monks smile with interest when they hear it. This name is no empty sound, it has a deep significance, it gives to the young monk a holy patron, who is to be his guide, protector, and model; it is under his standard, and with his battle-cry, that he is to win Heaven, and from him his future life will receive a fresh direction.

"In token of your reception into our community," concludes the Abbot, "we will now wash your feet." He then rises, and bearing the insignia of his dignity as the representative of Christ, and like Him, girt with a linen cloth, he goes to the bench on which the five novices have ranged themselves. He then kneels down, washes the right foot of each, dries and kisses it. Meanwhile the choir sing the antiphon which the Abbot had previously intoned: "*Mandatum Novum*," "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John xiii, 34). Then the words of the Gospel concerning the washing of the feet are sung, interspersed with verses of the psalms and antiphons in which the mystery of the love of our Lord, and His command of fraternal charity are commemorated; and then, as if to confirm

this promise of charity, the monks go up, two and two, and, kneeling down, reverently kiss the feet of the new brothers. This touching ceremony is concluded by a prayer which the Abbot sings, and the convent leaves the Chapter House.

On the following day, before the High Mass, the Abbot, seated on his throne at the side of the sanctuary, gives his new sons the novice's cowl, their choir dress, and thus completes their solemn reception into the Novitiate, where they are to remain for a whole year. A year seems a long time, and yet it flies past so swiftly, and, indeed, it is little enough in which to lay the foundation for the whole religious life. Our Holy Father St Benedict, even in his day, prescribed a period of twelve months, during which the novices were to go through their probation in a cell set apart for them. Three times in that year was the Holy Rule to be read through to them, and they were to be tried in all patience. It is, in fact, a time of trial. The novice must be examined and proved, to ascertain whether he be truly called by God. He who is invited to the table of a king does not stop to inquire whether he be worthy or no; on the contrary, the more lowly he esteems himself, the more simply will he obey the royal command. The grace of a vocation to the religious life is so entirely a gift from God, that no one could ever deserve it; it is so sublime, that no one can fully realise it; and yet it is at the same time so delicate, that it must be guarded by humility, and confidence, like a March violet in the grass. The whole mystery, and the whole art of solving the question, consists for the novice in giving

himself up in a childlike spirit, fully and frankly, becoming as a child amongst children, having no will but that of God, which is made manifest to him by his superiors. The whole matter rests in this probation, and for the novice it is a light one. The Abbot and the Novice Master appointed by him often ask themselves seriously before God whether a soul is called to religious life at all, and if so, whether it is destined for the Benedictine Order.

Each Order has, as we have already stated, a sharply defined character, a certain type, according to which its sons are formed and trained. The nature of this in the Benedictine Order is no narrow one, since all may be received into it who desire to walk in the way of perfection. But inasmuch as the wisdom of the Holy Ghost and the solicitude of Mother Church have permitted new Orders to be founded for new requirements of external activity, a more specific vocation must serve to decide between one of these and the Order of St Benedict.

If we would inquire what may be considered the special sign of a vocation to the monastic state, we may well turn for a description of it to our Holy Father St Benedict, who in the 58th chapter of his Holy Rule lays down four such marks: 1. *Whether he who knocks at the door of the cloister truly seeks God;* 2. *Whether he be zealous for the Work of God;* 3. *Whether he be desirous of obedience;* 4. *Whether he be prepared for humiliations and contempt.*

The Work of God is that solemn praise of God in community, the Divine Office of the Church, which is

as the pole-star to the Benedictine monk, shining each day with fresh brilliancy, and by the light of which he is to sanctify himself. Obedience is the foundation of all religious life, the keystone which secures all the single blocks which serve to construct the house of God; it makes of the monk a Cenobite and a member of the monastic family. "He who taketh not up his cross to follow Me is not worthy of Me," said our Saviour; a monk, who is not joyfully desirous of receiving humiliations, is not called to become a close follower of Christ.

Like their fellow-novices who immediately embrace the five new brothers who are the fruit of their prayers, and greet them for the first time by their new names, we, too, will wish them all happiness, courage, and confidence. Sanctified like the Nazarites of the old Covenant, sheltered from the world by the holy habit and enclosure, and from the arch enemy and their own passions by monastic discipline and regular observance, they now hide themselves in the solitude of the noviceship. Their ideas and expectations as to monastic life had been perhaps very far removed from the reality as they now find it; it is for them to accept it with cheerful docility, to give themselves up to it with childlike simplicity, and not to desire it to be in any respect different to that which God has prepared for them. They learn what it is to be sons of the great Father St Benedict; to contemplate his life, his virtues, and his doctrine; to love, and deeply to penetrate into the spirit of his Holy Rule, as it is developed to them by the Abbot and their Novice Master. As in the Refectory their bodily life is

cared for, so also for their soul there is daily spread a bountiful repast; they may revel in the pure delights of the Divine Office, in the profound mysteries of the sacred Liturgy, which open up to them a new world; they enjoy the sacred melodies of the hymns, antiphons, and glorious psalms. The sacred Scripture is their bread of life, which the ancient fathers break to them; at table they feast on the spiritual food of the reading, and daily conferences supply them also with strength and refreshment.

They dwell in the house of the Lord, under the same roof with their Eucharistic God; they serve at His altar, and draw strength and consolation from His Most Holy Body and Most Precious Blood. Free from all care and responsibility, engaged only in such light occupation as holy obedience may impose upon them, they can give themselves up entirely to the deepening and enlarging of the life of the soul. The "*Oportet semper orare*," "Pray without ceasing," of the Apostle, becomes for them the sweet obligation of their life, which is ever kept up and fostered by devotion in common as well as by private meditation.

But in order that the body may be a healthy habitation for the soul, the novices, according to ancient monastic custom, are daily given some manual labour. If they have to sweep the stairs and passages of the monastery, they can meditate upon the Son of God in the house of Nazareth; and this has been done in imitation of Him by many a prince and noble, as we can testify from our own observation. It is true the manual labour of the

novices does not stand in high repute, and many a good housewife would not be satisfied with their way of handling brooms and dusters; even our lay-brothers are not always content with it, and the old gardener absolutely declines their aid in digging and planting. But they win their laurels in the hay-fields, in which they, at any rate, might earn their bread by the sweat of their brows. Again, at the time for digging up the potatoes, they sally forth, armed with hoes and spades, to imitate the ancient fathers of the desert, and the father in charge of the garden can always reckon on the ready service of the merry little band.

So we may with quiet mind leave those five with the others, under the safe conduct of their Master and their new patrons; we know they are safely sheltered beneath the ample folds of St Benedict's mantle, and if the old enemy should ever seek to sow the seeds of doubt and misgiving, like tares amidst the good corn of their holy vocation, let them ask themselves, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?"

At the year's end, on the same day, if God so will, they will make their vows, and our guests will no doubt like to be present on that occasion, for the ceremony of Holy Profession is a most beautiful and edifying function. It is a festival day for God and his holy angels, a festival for the monastic family, a festival for the congregation of the Abbey Church, and for the neighbourhood, and for the relations and friends of those to be professed; but for themselves, above all, it is the greatest of feasts—indeed, one may say, next to that of their holy baptism, it is the chief

festival of their whole life, being, as it is, a second baptism which they are privileged to receive in full consciousness of their happiness.

This striking and most touching ceremony cannot be described in a few words ; one must have assisted at it in order rightly to understand it, and hence I can but advise our guests to return and be present at the beautiful rite. They will thank me, for surely no heart can be so devoid of feeling as not to be deeply touched at the sight of those who offer themselves, with all they are and all they possess, as a holocaust to the Lord their God.

The final decision is expressed in various ways. First, they have to choose, before the convent assembled in chapter, between their secular clothes and the monastic habit placed on tables on either side of the Chapter-house. This does not take long, for their heart has long since made that choice, and turned away from all the pomp and honours of this world. Then, kneeling before the high altar, at which the Abbot celebrates Pontifical Mass, surrounded by the whole circle of professed monks and lay-brothers, they make their vows "before God and His saints." The Mass is interrupted at the Offertory, the Abbot seats himself, surrounded by his assistant priests, before the altar, and puts the decisive questions to them, which they answer in the affirmative. But their decision must be yet more freely announced. They rise, as men who can still dispose of themselves, and read, aloud and clearly, so that their voice is distinctly heard by the listening crowd, the formula of their vows. They vow

"Stability, Conversion of Manners, and Obedience, according to the Rule of St Benedict, and the Constitutions approved by the Holy See," and they finally sign the beautifully illuminated parchment on which their vows are inscribed with the sign of the Cross, and with their names. This is the decisive act which binds them for ever; a promise made in the most solemn manner to God.

It is a threefold vow, and first of Stability, *i.e.*, of perseverance till death in that monastic family of which they have become members. Before the time of St Benedict this vow was not made; the monks frequently went from one monastery to another, some out of holy zeal or humility, some out of restless self-love. By this vow of Stability St Benedict settled the monastic state on a firm foundation, and by means of it he founded, in thousands of monasteries which have since borne his name, a steadfast family of God, with unchanging rights and duties. This vow, which extends to perseverance in the observance of the rule of monastic discipline, makes the monk a Benedictine.

They also vow "*Conversio morum*," "Conversion of Manners," a turning away from the world, and a turning towards God, by the continual following of Christ, in poverty and chastity. This vow binds them to a constant tending to perfection, and to ceaseless labour in overcoming their faults and weaknesses. For, according to the measure of his talents and his grace, a monk must continually be making progress; if not, "*Monachus non es*," "Then art thou no monk," says Blosius.

Included in this vow, or, more correctly speaking, implied in the act of religious profession, are those other vows essentially belonging to the religious state, viz., those of poverty and chastity. St Benedict does not mention them, he takes them for granted. Evangelical poverty, the highest degree of which he demands with such strictness in his Holy Rule, is for him one and the same thing as renunciation of the world; not a pin or a book can be called one's own, "for let him know that he has no longer any power over his own body or over his own will." And as to chastity—the Holy Father in the fourth chapter of his Rule instils into the hearts of his monks the love of holy purity. As a vow, according to St Thomas's opinion, it is included in "Conversion of Manners." A monk is a vessel consecrated to God, and if under the Old Covenant to touch such with unconsecrated hand was punishable by death, what chastisement does he deserve who would dare sacrilegiously to dishonour a sacrifice offered up on the altar of the New Covenant?

But it is different with the third vow, which is held essential by Holy Church for religious profession, that of Obedience. This is the principal, most important, and most difficult of the vows; it expresses most definitely the complete surrender of self, the unconditional holocaust, and therefore this solemn renunciation of freewill, this noblest gift most worthy of a human being, is held as the last and most perfect vow. We may indeed say that it includes all the others, for our Holy Father terms it the "strong and bright armour" of those who fight

in the cause of the heavenly King; it is the narrow and difficult, but sure, path to Heaven.

The threefold knot is tied, the decisive step has been taken. It only remains now to make the brethren witnesses of it, as well as God and the saints, and this the newly professed do by going round the circle of the monks, and showing to each in turn the paper they have just signed. They then lay it, with their own hand, upon the altar of God, where, as if included in the Holy Sacrifice, it remains until the Mass is ended.

The beautiful ceremonies are but, as it were, the reverberations of this making of the vows, and are expressive of nothing but joy, thanksgiving, and intercession. It is simply indescribable; one must see and hear for oneself how those who are now freed from the world sing with outstretched arms their "*Suscipe*" . . . "Receive me, O Lord, according to Thy word, and I shall live, and let me not be disappointed in my hope!" This touching expression of confiding, blissful self-surrender into the hands of God, has drawn unaccustomed tears from the eyes of many.

The Abbot now vests them in the cowl,* the choir mantle in which they are to take their place in the courts of the King of Heaven. The brethren next welcome them into their ranks with the kiss of peace. They then go and repose, while the Holy Sacrifice is continued, in their mystical grave

*With us, novices wear a cowl without sleeves, the ample flowing sleeves so characteristic of the monastic habit being reserved for the professed monks.

in the centre of the choir. They are dead to the world; and their nearest relations, father or brothers who have their share in the sacrifice, hold, their eyes streaming the while, the ends of the pall. Not until Holy Communion are they aroused by the voice of the deacon who comes to them and cries: "Arise from the dead, ye that slumber, and Christ will enlighten you." These chosen souls then go up to the altar, and receive the first visit of the Bridegroom, to whom they have just given themselves for ever.

Such, sketched out in a few broad lines, is the exterior course of the ceremony of profession. But, however touching such a function may be, it can only slightly suggest what takes place at that moment in the life of the soul. The hours have sped by on rapid wing, but, for the newly professed, they have brought the beginning of a new life. God Himself has shut behind them the door of the ark that is to carry them over the waters, and within its peaceful walls we feel that the young monks are secure. That it will be no life of comfortable ease we already know; nor will suffering and trials be wanting when the few short weeks of their honeymoon is over; but it is for this they are come, that with their cross on their shoulders they may follow their Saviour laden with His own. This consolation will be greater for the cross, the graces more abundant, the reward all the sweeter. A venerable grey-headed monk, who has grown old in the abbey, once assured me: "With every year of religious life, with each year spent in the cloister,

grace of heart, the realisation of one's happiness, and joyful thanksgiving to God, increases;" and indeed he was right; thousands of religious will confirm his statement.

May the young monks we saw clothed to-day enter the ranks of those so happily professed, and labour ever more and more, as long as God so wills, with unabated zeal, at the transformation of their interior and exterior being in the sense of the Holy Rule, so that they may verify the old saying: "A Benedictine is another Benedict." Having been placed by the heavenly gardener in this little earthly paradise of His, may these young trees strike deep and strong roots, grow green, blossom and bear fruit, and be neither shattered nor uprooted by any storm, until He transplant them Himself into His eternal paradise of bliss.

CHAPTER XVII

DEPARTURE

WERE you ever in the lántern-room of a lighthouse? and have you watched from that lonesome height how the ships rode over the blue waves; how, with their sails all glistening white in the evening sunshine, they disappeared like swans in the far distance; and then when the sun, like a fiery ball, wrapped in the mist of night, sank to rest in the dark sea, how the watchman lighted up the great lamp with its metal reflectors, and how its rays streamed forth far over the sea, pointing out the way to the shores of the native land? In that single hour, which you dreamed away up there, you saw as in a mirror the whole simple life of that lighthouse-keeper; the seasons change, the waves rage and roar, and then lie smooth once more beneath the bright sunbeams, still, day after day, year in, year out, he lights up his lamp for the use of all who watch for it.

And, in somewhat the same way, this day in the cloister has put before us the whole life of its inmates.

However rich in variety the liturgical life may be, and however manifold may be its ever-fresh phases, as developed by the seasons and festivals of the ecclesiastical year, still, to the visitor, the public life of the community bears the stamp of stability; just as the graceful, starry beacon of the lighthouse, be it summer or winter, holds sway without. And the life of the individual? Undoubtedly, if the monk be what his name implies, if he be the faithful guardian of the flame in this his watch-tower, his life also, which we have seen him commence so full of youthful enthusiasm, and which he will continue to lead with prayerful perseverance and ever-increasing happiness and merit, will glide peacefully by like a richly-laden ship on some majestic river, until, sooner or later, the goal be reached. And what is the goal of the religious? None other than that of all mankind—God.

You ask that boyish-looking monk, whose dark eyes glance at you so brightly from beneath his hood, why he has entered the monastery? He will probably answer: "In order to dedicate all my powers to Him who has called me into His service."—"In order to belong to God without reserve, and to learn to love Him more and better," replies another of riper years and gentler bearing. —"In order to die happily!" says a religious who has grown grey in the cloister; and he it is that hits the mark most surely, for this is also the chief desire and the last end of both the others. Yes, for on a good death depends the fate of eternity, and our whole life ought to be but a

preparation for that hour of trial. The awful uncertainty "whether we be worthy of love or hatred," the anxious question: "Shall I persevere?" will then be decided. One can, of course, even in the world, prepare oneself well for the end of life, and the mercy of God brings before us examples in every station of self-sacrificing virtue and self-renouncing charity; but it seems to me as if some of our guests were leaving the cloister with a little holy envy of those who enjoy the shelter and peace it affords.

"Blessed are they that dwell in the House of the Lord, that stand in the Courts of the House of our God;" they "will not be disappointed of their hope." Our Lord has promised to reward a hundredfold, in this world, those who leave all for His name's sake, and to give them "everlasting life."

A few years ago, in the Abbey of M—, a pious lay-brother died. He had when still in the world prayed much for a good death, and with this intention he had prepared himself every year for the Feast of the Most Holy Rosary, by receiving Holy Communion on the fifteen preceding Sundays, in honour of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary. His wish was to be fulfilled. The dear Mother of God drew him into the cloister, where, after a few years of a zealous and pious life, he died on the Saturday after the Feast of the Holy Rosary, a most singularly edifying and holy death. "His countenance," said an eye-witness, "shone like a rose. I know not if I ever saw Heaven so near

before." And even now, whilst I am writing these pages, a novice has just made his vows on his death-bed. He, indeed, came into the cloister to die there. "I have lived half a century in the world," said he, after he had exchanged title, rank, and property for a poor religious habit, and his name for that of his Holy Father, the founder of the Order,—"the remainder I will spend in the cloister for God!" Our dear Lord accepted the exchange, and, satisfied with a single year of probation, He then received him into His heavenly cloister. "In the whole of my long practice," said the physician, "I have never seen any one meet death with such joy, and so utterly without fear."

At the call of God, "*Paratum cor meum*,"—"My heart is ready, O Lord," replies the Christian. And for attaining to such a state of preparation as this, the cloister affords better and more efficacious assistance than can be found in the world.

Sudden deaths are frequent enough; we behold in them the warning love of God, in order that others may fear, and thus the word may not be fulfilled for them, "I will come as a thief in the night."

Death may, indeed, be sudden, but it need never be unprepared. One often hears a sudden death spoken of as a "priest's death." It is as if God would show in these His chosen servants, that He keeps His word, and that one must be ready for His coming.

One priest returning home, worn out by a round of parish work, dropped dead on his doorstep; another died in the confessional, in the very act of

giving absolution. A preacher in Paris (Abbé Papillon, 1824) exclaimed from the pulpit, before a numerous congregation: "Oh! how precious is every moment of our lives, since we never know when God may summon us before His judgment seat to render our account to Him." The last words he pronounced with the greatest difficulty, he then sank down, and in a few moments was a corpse. Father John Morris, S.J., died in like manner in the pulpit at Wimbledon, with the words, "Render unto God the things that are God's," still quivering on his lips. The shepherds should go before their flocks, showing them by their good example how to await the coming of the bridegroom with their lights burning.

How many a poor sinner may have entered into himself, on the sudden death of his pastor, who had so often spoken to his conscience, and may have thought, trembling, "What if that had happened to me!"

If we may venture to say that sudden deaths happen more rarely in the monastery, this may, perhaps, be part of the promised reward, and a special mark of the paternal gentleness of God towards his cloistered children. Perhaps, too, it is obtained for us by our Holy Father St Benedict, whom we daily remind of his own holy death, and to whom, with this intention, we especially dedicate every Tuesday, that he may get us the grace of a duly prepared death; perhaps, again, it is because our Lord will not deprive the brethren of the example a holy death-bed gives them, and of the opportunity for

the practice of fraternal charity afforded by the lingering sickness and death of a confrère.

Amongst all the works of mercy, undoubtedly that of the bodily and spiritual care of the sick and dying must rank first, and so St Benedict has dedicated to this subject a special chapter of his Holy Rule (c. 36). He bids the Abbot to have at heart the care of the sick before everything else; because in them Christ Himself is served, according to the words, "I was sick and you visited Me," "Whatever you have done unto the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me." They are to be tended in a cell set apart for them, by a zealous and God-fearing attendant, and all severity of rule and discipline is to be set aside, or dispensed with, as circumstances may require. The human heart is inclined by nature to compassionate the sick, and the Christian religion has ennobled this sentiment, and developed it into one of the loveliest blossoms of self-sacrificing charity towards our neighbour.

The religious family should not be behind-hand in this, for if they are bound to show forth the spirit of Jesus Christ in works of mercy to the world outside, surely they must do so most especially towards their own brethren. The sick must always be the best beloved members of the community. Our visit to the abbey is therefore not yet complete; we have, as yet, passed over a small and hidden, but by no means unimportant part, the Infirmary, and I beg our visitors, though already on the threshold, to turn back a few moments that I may take them there.

It is separated from the main body of the abbey buildings, but is joined to them by a long corridor. It can thus be completely isolated if need be, and it has its own chapel, kitchen, and parlour. The utmost quiet and retirement reigns in this little building, which is peculiarly light and cheerful of aspect. Matting deadens the sound of footsteps in the little hall, into which open the doors of three or four sickrooms of different sizes. Between these rooms is the chapel and the cell of the Infirmarian. The chapel is taken up through the two storeys of the buildings, and communicates by glass doors or windows with the various sickrooms. In spite of the utmost simplicity, every want is carefully supplied in the most comfortable way. Our guests will have been over many a well-ordered hospital, so that I may spare them the details of our humble monastic arrangements. They manifest, at any rate, our good will and the endeavour to provide for our sick brethren to the best of our ability.

In the largest room of the Infirmary are several white-covered beds, in one of which is a brother dangerously ill; the Infirmarian is just giving him some soup, a spoonful at a time, with the tender care of a mother. Then he arranges his pillows as a Sister of Mercy might do, and is repaid for the service by a gentle "May God reward you."

We will put ourselves in the place of this invalid, that we may in his name thank that God, so rich in mercy, who surrounds him with so much fraternal charity. This also is part of the hundredfold promised on earth.

The sick man is laid on a good mattress, instead of the conventual straw-bed, and his head is resting on soft pillows; all about is bright, and clean, and fresh, and this in itself is no little comfort to the sick. The weary eye lingers on the pictures on the wall — the sweet form of our Lady of Pity, St Joseph, our Holy Father St Benedict, and, above all, the Crucified. Between them are painted suitable passages of Holy Scripture, to feed the spirit with heavenly bread. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life," reads one. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed to us," says another sentence. "If I suffer with Christ, we shall also rejoice with Him," is the consolation offered by a third.

Opposite the bed is a glass door covered by a green curtain, which looks on to the chapel. If the Infirmarian wishes to give the invalid a treat, or to perform some little devotion with him, he draws back that curtain, and then the altar is just before him. In this way the sick man, without moving from his couch, can assist at Mass each morning, for there is one said here every day, which opens heaven for him. Then the doors are thrown wide open, and the priest coming in, brings him the Bread of Life; his Saviour comes in person to visit him, and fill him with heavenly consolation! Is not this a royal sick-bed? What prince on earth can boast such wealth as this poor monk? Surely he is to be envied on that bed of pain, which is surrounded by such consolations. Well, therefore, might a humble lay-brother

who was able to crawl from his sickbed to the parlour, a few days before his death, to console his weeping mother, say to her with enthusiasm: "O mother, if I were to be born a thousand times, I would go a thousand times into the cloister, in order to die there!"

How many have already laid on this sickbed—one to rise again and return to his work or to the choir, another to exchange it for the last narrow bed. Both of them went, strengthened for fresh life, from the quiet sickroom—the one to earthly labour, the other to heavenly rest. Both will look back to it with fervent thanksgiving, and indeed they have every reason to do so, for the time they spent there was a season of grace, and, therefore, the one will work with all the more diligence for the monastery, and the other will have become a support and an intercessor for it before the throne of God. It may, perhaps, be true that in the storeroom of a tender mother, or of an anxious and loving wife, greater delicacies may be at hand than the Infirmarian can procure, although in his charity towards the sick he is wonderfully inventive.

It may well be also that around other sickbeds there may be found more representatives of the art of healing, although the domestic physician of the monastery is a clever and experienced one, and the Infirmarian himself has gone through a good course of training. But, after all, can these varied resources of wealth and science do much to relieve the sick? Faith teaches us that sickness is a trial sent by God, that suffering and pain tend to cleanse the soul.

and to ripen virtue so as to prepare us for heaven. Hence, however much may be done with all solicitude by a kind Infirmarian to make the suffering more endurable for the invalid, it is still more important that it should be made meritorious. When both these objects are attained, as far as is in any way possible, then the end God designed will be also arrived at, and the sickness will have a grace both for the patient and those who attend on him.

We knew a brother, Columba by name, who often and frequently entreated his Guardian Angel to give him a clear insight into his state. And when the Infirmarian told him his end was drawing near, he received the tidings with a cheerful smile. He asked of God the grace to die on Good Friday; but he afterwards repented of this, because his funeral would disturb the Easter joy of the convent, and by his prayers he hastened his end—he died on the Feast of our Lady of Pity. Thus that dear Mother of Sorrows called him away, she to whom, as we found in his notebook, he had for years daily said an "*Ave*" for a happy death.

Faith in the wonderful mercy of God serves, likewise, to strengthen the hope of recovery, and there are many pious restoratives, the prescriptions for which are not to be found in medical handbooks, but which have still often proved efficacious. Our invalids venerate our holy Father St Benedict, and have great faith in his blessed medal; they are also given the blessing of St Maurus with a relic of the Holy Cross, which has brought about full many a cure that the physicians could in nowise account for; and besides these, there are holy oils

from the relics of the saints, and holy relics themselves, and holy water, each and all of which are often efficacious means, when used with confidence, for calling down the mercy of God upon the sick. But all these must be coupled with Christian submission to the will of God. The desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ is a grace for predestined souls, but resignation to the holy will of God is the duty of every Christian, and a condition for a good death. But how can we evoke this necessary disposition in the heart of a sick person if we conceal from him, through culpable weakness, the danger of his state? Of this there is no fear in the cloister, and what a consolation is it for the sick to feel thus secure. "As God wills!" was the repeated exclamation of a young cleric, who, in these sentiments of conformity, abandoned himself to the Divine good pleasure.

There is a legend, that in the Abbey of C——, three days before the death of a religious a white rose was found before his place in choir; he who found it there took it up silently, and prepared himself for death.

Preparation for death implies the detachment of the soul from all that is of earth, and the lifting it up towards God. The former has already been done by the religious when he made his holy vows; it only remains for him to do the latter—that is, to raise his soul to God by the free sacrifice of his life. And in this also fraternal charity may much assist him. They say of the Tyrolese peasantry that they send first for the priest and then for the doctor. In the monastery, a religious finds both

these means of help united; it is the duty of the Infirmarian to care for both the soul and body. And when the last hour draws near, the indefatigable and experienced Infirmarian redoubles his solicitude for his dear brother, and all the others are ready to help him. The Abbot comes frequently to comfort the invalid with his blessing; some of the religious watch by him during the night and are ready to render him any assistance; each one has a friendly smile, a gentle word, a pious prayer for him; yes, above all, prayer! It is not every sick person who is in a state to recite his Breviary up to the very last day, or even to have it read to him, as was the case with one of our fathers who died recently. This true son of St Benedict, who, together with his name had also inherited his spirit, on the evening of the day before his death, turning to the Infirmarian, lifted up two fingers, to show him that the second nocturn of the Office was wanting. The last compline was his night prayer and his dying prayer. Others move their dying lips in fervent aspirations, or in psalms. The Venerable Bede ended with the antiphon, "*O Rex gloriæ*" on the ascension-day of his life; St Francis rendered up his soul with the last words of the 141st Psalm: "*Me expectant justi*," "The just expect me;" one of our lay-brothers just turned his head on one side, saying, "Jesus! Mary!"

The last sacraments have been administered to the sick monk, with all their impressive rites; he has been laid, by his own desire, on consecrated ashes spread upon the floor in the form of a cross; the

whole convent is kneeling, inside or just outside the room, in quiet prayer; he holds the crucifix and the rosary in one failing hand, and they place the blessed candle in the other. With scarcely audible voice, he begs the convent to pardon any annoyance or scandal he may have given. Then the Abbot, at his earnest entreaty, gives him leave to die, so that even his very passing away may be an act of Holy Obedience; he speaks words of consolation to him, and encourages him to endure the last struggle with fortitude. The picture of the Holy Mother of God, whom he has so honoured during life, is placed near him, and she seems to smile lovingly upon him, as he raises his dim eyes towards her; and whilst the brethren, in low tones, repeat the prayers for the dying, his lips still move to join in them. Once again he makes a final effort, and renews his vows, and then at the words: "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit, Lord Jesus, receive my soul,"—his spirit wrestles to get free.

Then rises, soft and sweet from the lips of the brethren, the consecration song of Holy Profession, "*Suscipe me, Domine,*" "Receive me, O Lord, according to Thy Word!" It may sound in his dying ears like a melody from that beautiful world, of which the gates are being opened to him. "Receive me, O Lord!" he has so often said, "be Thou my eternal rest, my portion for ever, my exceeding great reward, my glorious crown! Open to me that cloister of marvellous light, that enrapturing, jubilant choir, in which Thou, Abba, Father, art all in all! Amen, Alleluia!"

All is over! Even in the cloister, grief must have its way; not with the inconsolable complaint of the world, but with a gentle sorrow, not unmixed with joy. We know that the good son who is with his Holy Father and Founder, will be a true friend and intercessor for us with God. It remains to fulfil the last offices of love for him.

The body of a monk is laid out in the Chapter House. There he lies as in his last sleep; the limbs worn by sickness are clothed in the cowl, the choir-mantle in which he has so often sung the praises of God; it is the wedding garment of Holy Profession, the robe of honour in which he is to enter the heavenly choir. His thin fingers clasp the image of the Crucified, with whom, being dead to the world, he will be raised to life again, the rosary, which was his daily companion and faithful friend, and which has now formed a chain of graces to draw him upward, and the medal of our Holy Father, which has been his protection against the old enemy, and is now his passport to the other world. Two monks keep watch beside him, reciting psalms in low tones like a soft duet at the foot of their brother's bier. There is no other sound to be heard in the room, which is dimly lighted by a few torches.

On the eve of the third day, the body is carried into the church and laid on a simple catafalque, surrounded by six candles. No secular garlands of flowers disturb the solemn and yet most peaceful impression made by the sight of the dear brother reposing there in the midst of the convent. They recite the Office for the dead, and he seems to listen

to the psalms, as they resound from side to side across him; his last path in the monastery could only be to the choir; his last duty must be performed there, and there must he receive the last farewell of his sorrowing brethren.

During the night they watch in prayer by turns beside him, and on the following morning, the Requiem Mass is sung, and the Abbot gives the last absolution. Then the coffin is carried by the monks in procession to the vault, whilst the consoling "*In Paradisum*" is sung, "May the angels of God lead thee to Paradise, may His martyrs receive thee and bring thee to the heavenly Jerusalem. May the choir of angels receive thee, and with Lazarus, once so poor, mayest thou obtain eternal rest!" O blessed resting-place of happy monks!

It was formerly the last wish and highest ambition of princes to be permitted to rest in the consecrated ground of the cloister. They founded abbeys to the glory of God, and asked in return but a grave in the midst of the monks, so that their prayers in the choir might ascend to God over their remains, and win for them a gracious judgment at His tribunal, and eternal peace in His kingdom.

It is related of the Holy Emperor, Henry II., that being once on a visit to the Abbey of Cluny, he was so struck with the pious life of the monks, that he threw himself at the feet of St Odilo, and begged to be received into the community. The holy Abbot at last said that he would accede to the entreaties of the Emperor, and having assembled the convent, he gave the holy habit to the imperial postulant. Then, in virtue of the

obedience he had promised, he imposed upon his new son, as his first obligation, the command to take again the royal sceptre, and to continue to govern his realm to the glory of God.

Now that the guide has brought our visitors back once more to the cloister door, this beautiful old story of the Emperor Henry inspires him with the earnest wish that God may lend to his poor words, flowing as they do from the superabundance of his own happiness, power and efficacy to bring about a like change in the hearts of his guests. And then, like St Odilo, he would beg them to continue to be in the world outside, sympathising and affectionate friends of our house, true sons and daughters of our Holy Father St Benedict. May they be penetrated with his spirit, may they rule their household and their family under his protection, and be ever defenders of the faith, upholders of morality and justice, and zealous combatants for the liberty of the Holy Church. May God be glorified in them and in all things.

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